

Canadian Wildlife Service
Arctic Ecology Map Series
Critical Wildlife areas

Descriptive report

Thomsen River

THOMSEN RIVER
(Sheet #2034)

This map sheet encompasses a land and sea area of some 94,000 square miles. The northern four fifths of Banks Island, the west half of Melville Island and portions of Victoria and Prince Patrick Island are included in this sheet.

Banks Island is one of the most important wildlife areas in the western Arctic. Several species of wildlife reside permanently or seasonally on the island and on its adjacent waters. Banks Island contains the largest known populations of Arctic Fox in the Arctic. The annual harvest of foxes by residents of Sachs Harbour has an average annual value of \$250,000. The northern and central regions of the island contain the highest fox populations.

Migratory waterfowl and other birds are abundant on Banks Island. Pacific Black Brant nest all around the island in a twenty mile wide strip with largest concentrations of breeding and molting birds in the west and southwest lowlands. Large numbers of King Eider Ducks nest on the numerous inland lakes. Eider populations in the order of 150,000 birds have been estimated. Lesser Snow (and Blue) Geese nest and molt in the Egg, Big and Thomsen River systems. The Egg River population has been estimated at 100,000 or more birds.

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Sandhill Cranes are frequent summer residents and over 250 nesting pairs have been counted. The endangered Peregrine Falcon and Gyrfalcon are also summer nesting residents in several areas of Banks Island and the southeast part of Melville Island.

While important anadromous fish rivers are found on Banks Island, in general, there are no important fisheries on Melville Island due to the lack of permanent river systems.

Seals and Beluga Whales are common at various points around Banks Island and herds of Bowhead Whales are common in the area.

Wildlife of the other island areas on this sheet are less known although Muskoxen, caribou, Polar Bear, Arctic Fox and several species of waterfowl are found on Victoria and Melville Islands, while seals and Beluga Whales are found in their coastal waters.

There are no settlements on this map sheet although residents of Sachs Harbour on the Horton River sheet make much use of the central and northern section of Banks Island for trapping and hunting.

The following is the descriptive text for units mapped on this sheet.

UNIT NUMBER	DESCRIPTION
1	A very productive region for Muskoxen. The vegetation is lush and the area is used year round. This area should be considered critical. A variety of ducks and other bird life are found here as well, and the area is considered ecologically unique. (Harington)
2	This is an important area for Muskoxen (Comfort Cove). (Macpherson)
3	Muskoxen are found on the west side of Hecla and Griper Bay and Sabine Peninsula, the exact location is unknown. Total population for Melville Island was estimated to be 1,000 in 1961. (Tener 1963) Muskoxen found here. (Barry)
4	Peregrine Falcons have been observed nesting in this general area. (Thorsteinsson) No further data available.
5	Brant nesting. No further information available. (Barry)
6	Peregrine Falcons have been observed in this general area. No specific nesting locations are pinpointed. (Thorsteinsson) According to Thorsteinsson this is the only Peregrine nesting record north of Viscount Melville Sound.
7	A few Muskoxen have been observed in the Glenelg Bay region. (Thorsteinsson)
8	Arctic Char are found in lakes and rivers in this general area. (Thorsteinsson)

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- 9 The southeast edge of Prince Patrick Island is good Muskoxen and caribou habitat. (Macpherson) Muskoxen observed on this portion of Victoria Island. (Thorsteinsson)
- 10 Arctic Char run into Richard Collinson Inlet. (Hunter) No further data.
- 11 This unit is a migration route for Polar Bear moving to the Beaufort Sea and Alaska. The movement takes place March through June and a return movement later in the year. (Jonkel, Barry)
- 12 50 Muskoxen plus 14 calves were observed in May in this area. Muskoxen calve here. (Kevan) Muskoxen summer and winter range. (Macpherson)
- 13 The entire area of Banks Island is considered very important for Polar Bear denning. Additional information is needed concerning specific denning locations, however large river valleys seem to be more important than some of the highland areas. (Jonkel)
- Polar Bear denning likely occurs on Prince Patrick Island although none have been documented to date. (Jonkel)
- 14 This unit outlines an area which is used sporadically for caribou calving. (Barry)
- 15 This is a critical area for Muskoxen calving. The breeding population is in the hundreds, and the total population estimate made in 1970 was 635 animals. (Kevan, Williams, Macpherson, Harington)

UNIT NUMBER	DESCRIPTION
16	There is a good run of char, Lake Trout and Lake Herring along the Muskox River system. Landlocked char occur in the adjacent lakes. (Hunter)
17	Gyrfalcon nesting 1952-53 approximately 2 miles southeast of Mercy Bay. Possibly still there. (Barry) Gyrfalcons observed nesting in this general area. (Thorsteinsson)
18	Banks Island Migratory Bird Sanctuary #2. This unit is used by molting Snow Geese (25,000) July 1st to August 15th. In addition, some 5,000 Brant Geese molt here at the same time. (Barry), (Manning, <u>et al.</u> 1956)
19	An important caribou area, 1970 surveys revealed 69 females, 24 calves and 47 unidentified caribou. (Kevan) This is a suspected caribou rutting area. Many antlers from bulls have been found here. (Macpherson)
20	Muskoxen (300±) are concentrated in the north most of the year and drift south during the summer. (Barry)
21	An important unit for caribou calving. 168 caribou were observed here in 1970; 54 calves and 114 unidentified animals. (Kevan)
22	A Lesser Snow Goose molt migration. Geese move from Banks Island Sanctuary #1 to Banks Island Sanctuary #2. (Barry)

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- 23 Banks Island Migratory Bird Sanctuary #1.
A major Lesser Snow Goose nesting area on the Egg River, estimated 30,000 to 100,000 birds in 1953. (Manning, et al. 1956)
The Kellatt and Lennie Rivers are used by non-breeding Lesser Snow Geese. (Manning, et al. 1956)
- A good King Eider breeding area (1952-53) along Bernard River. Eiders are common throughout the island particularly the west and southwest side. The estimated total population for Banks Island in 1953 was 150,000. (Manning, et al. 1956)
- Lesser Snow Geese, 75,000 pairs nest on Big River. Brant Geese nest in the coastal regions adjacent along this area of Banks. Population size is approximately 5,000 pairs and nesting occurs May 25th to August 15th. Sandhill Cranes are found within the Migratory Bird Sanctuary, approximately 250 pairs nest here. (Barry)
- Polar Bear den in the region of Worth Point. (Harington)
- 24 Polar Bear frequent this area of Blue Fox Harbour. (Williams)
- 25 Bearded Seals are found along this coast. (Harington) No further data.
- 26 This area offshore is important to Polar Bear year round. It is a migration route which is used very extensively from March to June by females and cubs moving off of Banks Island onto the broken ice in search of food. This migration route should be considered a critical area. Parts of McClure strait may be included with this migratory movement. (Jonkel)
- Polar Bear are frequently observed offshore at the mouth of the Big River. (Barry)

REFERENCES

Personal Communication

- T. W. Barry
C. J. Jonkel (Canadian Wildlife Service)
A. H. Macpherson
- P. Kevan
- R. Williams Northwest Territories, Game Branch
- C. R. Harington National Museum of Canada
- J. G. Hunter (Fisheries Research Board of
A. W. Mansfield Canada)
- R. Thorsteinsson Institute of Sedimentary and
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