

Canadian Wildlife Service
Arctic Ecology Map Series
Critical Wildlife areas

Descriptive report

Belcher Channel

BELCHER CHANNEL
(Sheet #2021)

This map sheet encompasses some 106,000 square miles of the High Arctic islands. More than half of the area is marine. Major islands found on the sheet include Ellef and Amund Ringnes, Cornwall, and the south end of Axel Heiberg Island. Portions of Melville, Bathurst, Devon, Mackenzie King and Ellesmere Islands also occur on the map sheet.

In general the topography of the islands is rugged and sparsely vegetated. However, low lying coastal regions provide habitat for Muskoxen, Peary Caribou and some migratory waterfowl. Muskoxen and Caribou are found on several islands of the southern and western regions (Devon, Melville, Mackenzie King, Lougheed).

Polar Bear and Arctic Fox are common throughout much of the region, and Seals and Walrus are numerous in the southern areas of the map sheet.

Lesser Snow Geese, Black Brant and Eider Ducks are summer residents in several locations, and cliff nesting sea bird colonies are located along the coastlines. In general, the High Arctic islands are poor for anadromous fishes due to the lack of permanent streams and rivers.



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There are no occupied settlements on this map sheet. However, Eskimos from Grise Fiord often hunt in the southern areas.

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

UNIT NUMBER	DESCRIPTION
1	Ivory Gulls seen 1958, no breeding observed. (Thorsteinsson)
2	Greater Snow Geese, Eiders and probably Brant nest in this area of Axel Heiberg Island. While concentrations are not great, this unit is considered the most important area on the island. (Boyd)
3	A large concentration of Muskoxen (400±) is found year round across the island including the Fosheim Peninsula on the adjacent map sheet. (Thorsteinsson)
4	Polar Bear denning sites are found on creeks adjacent to the coast. (Harington, Macpherson) Denning takes place in the spring and early summer (June). (Macpherson) No information is available on the extent of the denning area.
5	This unit describes a Polar Bear migration route. Polar Bear are found following the open water leads and hunting seals in this area. (Harington) Macpherson states that this is very good Polar Bear area during some years only.
6	Graham Island. A good population of Peary Caribou. (Macpherson)
7	This unit outlines a critical Polar Bear concentration area. The area is used throughout the year, however denning has not been documented. (Jonkel, Thorsteinsson)
8	This area contains open water during the winter and is important as a wintering area for marine mammals, particularly Walrus. Some Beluga Whales

UNIT NUMBER	DESCRIPTION
8 (continued)	and Narwhal may also winter in this area. The greatest concentration occurs from October to June. The animals probably move in from Jones Sound. Walrus may also be found north of the Hell Gate Channel when broken ice pack permits. (Macpherson)
9	Portions of the southern shore of Ellesmere Island are used by Walrus as hauling out grounds. (Kerr) 100+ observed by Kerr at various points along this coast. Walrus are found throughout Jones Sound. (Harrington)
10	Fulmar nesting colony. (Boyd) No further information.
11	Polar Bear are found year round in this region of Jones Sound. Denning probably occurs in this area. The offshore areas are considered most important to the Polar Bear and are used for hunting seals. The Grise Fiord Eskimos hunt Polar Bear in this region. (Jonkel)
12	Walrus are found in Penny Strait when ice permits. (Macpherson)
13	Foxes are plentiful in this region and suspected to be denning here. (Kerr)
14	Caribou are numerous in this region. This is a rich and ecologically important region for a variety of species. (Kerr)
15	Caribou range, 100 with young were observed here in mid-July 1969. (Kerr)
16	Peary Caribou are found on the Sabine Peninsula. (Kerr) No further information.

UNIT NUMBER

DESCRIPTION

- 17 The whole of Lougheed Island is considered critical for Peary Caribou. (Thorsteinsson, Harington, Macpherson)
- The south half of the island is considered very critical according to Harington. Most recent estimate places population size at approximately 1,500. (Macpherson)
- 18 Peary Caribou are found on MacKenzie King Island. (Kerr) No further information
- 19 This is a Polar Bear migration route. The bears also utilize the offshore areas of MacKenzie King Island for hunting during the spring (March). (Jonkel)

REFERENCES

Personal Communications

H. Boyd
C. J. Jonkel (Canadian Wildlife Service)
A. H. Macpherson

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C. R. Harington National Museum of Canada

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