

BACKGROUNDER

Update on Woodland Caribou – Southern Mountain Population November 2011

Woodland caribou found in Jasper, Banff, Mount Revelstoke, and Glacier national parks belong to the Southern Mountain population listed as *Threatened* under Canada's *Species at Risk Act* (SARA). Within the Southern Mountain population, at least one herd has been extirpated (no longer exists in that area), and several other herds are at risk of disappearing. The status of these caribou herds varies throughout the different regions and each herd faces particular challenges on the road to successful recovery.

Jasper National Park

Every fall, Parks Canada biologists conduct population counts of the three southern herds in Jasper National Park. The current estimate in Jasper National Park is six caribou in the Maligne, 11 in the Brazeau, and 54 in the Tonquin, for a total population of 71. Caribou that may have been missed during visual surveys are accounted for by comparing the number of radio collared caribou seen to the total number of collared animals. Population estimates have a confidence interval of 64 to 92 (meaning that were you to conduct ten surveys, you would expect all the estimates to fall within this range, nine out of ten times).

The annual survey indicates that there has been no significant change over the past three years; however, the population numbers remain lower than the 2008 estimate of 127.

Parks Canada staff also observed approximately half the caribou cows with calves. This is one of the highest calf to cow ratios (number of calves per total number of cows) recorded in the last 20 years.

Mount Revelstoke and Glacier National Parks

Mount Revelstoke and Glacier National Parks are home to two woodland caribou subpopulations, the Columbia South herd whose range includes parts of both parks, and the Duncan herd whose range includes a small part of the south-east corner of Glacier National Park.

The Columbia South herd has declined significantly in the last 20 years. The last census, conducted in March 2011, counted only seven caribou (including two calves). In order to protect important winter habitat of this herd in Mount Revelstoke, a seasonal closure of the Mt. Klotz area has been in effect since 2007. Monitoring flights last winter found caribou using the area, and Parks Canada patrols the closure to help ensure compliance and reduce human impact on this sensitive species.

The Duncan herd was last surveyed by the BC Ministry of Environment in March 2010 and only one group of seven adult caribou was observed. Parks Canada will be working with BC Provincial biologists to survey this herd in the spring of 2012.

Banff National Park

In 2009, an avalanche killed the last known animals in the Banff woodland caribou herd. There have been no confirmed caribou sightings in Banff since that time.

For more information on woodland caribou in the mountain national parks visit www.parkscanada.gc.ca/caribou or email caribou@pc.gc.ca