

Preface

For centuries the lives of North American native peoples have been closely tied to the caribou, or *Rangifer tarandus*. For many of these peoples, caribou are more than a vital food source, they are, simply put, a way of life. There is growing interest in the longstanding relationship between the caribou and human populations who share the same territory, or in what is called traditional environmental knowledge.

Caribou ecology and conservation status differ radically among ecotypes, whether migratory-tundra, sedentary-boreal, montane, or insular. While the migratory caribou ecotype has been generally abundant since the early 1980s throughout North America, the sedentary ecotype has recently experienced continent-wide low densities and decline. Nevertheless, even migratory caribou have not always been plentiful, and over the last century, their numbers have fluctuated dramatically. If we look at the caribou populations on the Northern Québec and Labrador Peninsula, abrupt declines in caribou populations have led to starvation among some native groups. Following a period of relative abundance in the late 19th century, caribou numbers on the peninsula became very low from early the 1900s to about 1960. However, in the 1970s, for reasons that remain unclear, the Québec-Labrador caribou numbers began to rise again. Today, two migratory herds—the George River Herd (referred to locally as the *Troupeau de la Rivière George*) and the Leaf River Herd (*Troupeau de la Rivière aux Fenilles*)—whose territories overlap in their yearly migration, together make up one of the largest group of free-ranging ungulates in the world. One million-strong, these caribou roam through the region's arctic tundra, taiga, and boreal forest and use an area of about one million square kilometres annually. Such caribou populations form a part of our global heritage.

In this context of such fluctuations in numbers, a central concern is the current and future state of these caribou populations. Besides satisfying the subsistence and cultural needs of the native people, caribou are essential to the viability of many northern outfitting businesses that employ both natives and non-natives. Other activities in this Arctic landscape include hydroelectric development, construction, mining, forestry, military training, and tourism. More than ever, there is a need to document and assess the effects of direct and indirect human intervention on the caribou.

The North American Caribou Workshop is held every two or three years. The purpose of the event is to bring together people interested in caribou to share their knowledge about the species in order to ensure its conservation. Previous North American Caribou Workshop locations, dates, and themes are listed below.

- 1st: Whitehorse, Yukon Territory, Sept. 28-29, 1983, **Caribou and Human Activity**
- 2nd: Val Morin, Québec, Oct. 17-20, 1984, **Caribou Management – Census Techniques – Status in Eastern Canada**
- 3rd: Chena Hot Springs, Alaska, Nov. 4-6, 1987, **Reproduction and Calf Survival**
- 4th: St. John's, Newfoundland, Oct. 31-Nov. 3, 1989
- 5th: Yellowknife, Northwest Territories, March 19-21, 1991, **Caribou Management in the 1990s: Incorporating Theory into Practice**
- 6th: Prince George, British Columbia, March 1-4, 1994
- 7th: Thunder Bay, Ontario, Aug. 19-21, 1996, **Putting Caribou Knowledge into Ecosystem Context**
- 8th: Whitehorse, Yukon Territory, April 20-24, 1998, **A Future for an Ancient Deer**

From April 23 to 27, 2001, more than 230 caribou experts migrated to the 9th North American Caribou Workshop, held at the tree-line in the Inuit town of Kuujjuaq, Nunavik, Québec. This community of about 1800 people near Ungava Bay was chosen over larger cities in southern Québec following a survey of potential workshop participants. Holding the conference in such a particularly appropriate location was made possible by the sustained efforts of the Organizing and Scientific Committees, by the help of the sponsors, and, above all, by the tremendous support of the people of Kuujjuaq. Keeping in mind the importance of caribou to the local people and the fact that development and other fast-growing human activities have today reached the North—for many southerners, the last frontier—the theme chosen for the 9th North American Caribou Workshop was also particularly appropriate: **Caribou and Man**.

Workshop participants were first welcomed in Montreal, where they attended a special viewing of the IMAX® film *Great North*, featuring caribou/reindeer and northern peoples and filmed in Québec, Labrador, and Sweden. The next day, they were flown by charter plane to Kuujjuaq to attend the workshop. The organizers performed many logistical miracles, and during the five days in Kuujjuaq, participants discussed current issues related to the caribou, shared the results of research efforts, and exchanged ideas on the latest information and technologies. Scientists felt very welcome in Kuujjuaq: when additional sleeping quarters were required for the event, people literally opened their homes to the visitors.

Hosted by the Hunting, Fishing and Trapping Coordinating Committee (HFTCC), this conference provided a unique opportunity to increase our understanding of the caribou and to encourage research and productive communication. Appropriately, translations were provided in English, French and Inuktitut in order to serve the diverse audience present at the workshop. Scientists and members of aboriginal communities shared their concerns and information about caribou biology and conservation. Each day began with a prayer by a local representative. Each session began with a presentation by an Inuit, Cree, Naskapi, or Innu elder; these elders hailed from throughout Northern Québec and Labrador, and their presentations described current and past experiences with caribou and wildlife. The organizers' main objective was to make the workshop informative and to encourage the exchange of information between all participants. Sharing common interests for the caribou's Eurasian relative, many reindeer experts, particularly from Russia, Norway, and Sweden, brought interesting discussions to the workshop.

The editors of this issue would like to thank the members of the Organizing Committee and the Scientific Committee, the members of the HFTCC, the workshop sponsors, and the people of Kuujjuaq for making the 9th North American Caribou Workshop a success, not only for its science and knowledge content but also for its cultural value. Special thanks must be extended to the 230 migrants (from all ecotypes) who travelled to Kuujjuaq from all over the world, proving that it is possible to organize a large conference in a small Arctic community. We would also like to thank the authors and reviewers for their efforts in producing these valuable proceedings, which provide a permanent record of the discussions that took place in Kuujjuaq and which will foster further exchange among scientists and caribou users alike.

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