



**Influence du climat, de la disponibilité des  
ressources et de la taille des populations sur la  
phénologie et les patrons de migration du caribou  
migrateur, *Rangifer tarandus***

**Thèse**

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Sous la direction de :

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Christian Dussault, codirecteur de recherche

# Résumé

De nombreuses populations migratrices sont actuellement en déclin. Les changements climatiques entraînent des modifications dans les habitats des espèces migratrices et la phénologie des processus naturels, lesquels se répercutent sur la migration, une période critique pour ces espèces. Comprendre comment les variables environnementales et climatiques affectent la phénologie et les patrons de migration est donc crucial. Ma thèse s'intéresse à l'impact du climat, des ressources alimentaires et de la compétition sur les migrations printanières et automnales des caribous migrateurs, *Rangifer tarandus*, des troupeaux Rivière-George (TRG) et Rivière-aux-Feuilles (TRF) du Nord-du-Québec et du Labrador. Le premier volet de ma thèse propose une approche objective, basée sur la détection des changements dans la structure des déplacements saisonniers, pour identifier les dates de départ et arrivée en migration. Validée à l'aide de trajets simulés, elle a été appliquée aux migrations printanières et automnales de femelles caribous. Le second volet porte sur l'impact des conditions environnementales sur la phénologie des migrations de printemps et d'automne. Il montre que la phénologie de la migration est principalement affectée par les conditions climatiques rencontrées lors de la migration, les conditions d'enneigement affectant notamment les coûts des déplacements. Au printemps, les caribous subissent des conditions défavorables lorsque la fonte des neiges est précoce. À l'automne, ils semblent ajuster leurs déplacements et migrent plus vite quand la neige débute tôt pour limiter les coûts de déplacement dans une neige profonde. Le troisième volet porte sur les patrons de migration à l'automne et montre que ceux-ci sont affectés essentiellement par une compétition intra- et inter-troupeaux pour les aires d'hivernages. Les caribous du TRG répondent à une augmentation de la compétition sur les aires les plus proches de l'aire de mise bas, liée à une taille de population élevée, en migrant préférentiellement vers les aires les plus éloignées. L'utilisation des aires hivernales par les caribous du TRF est, quant à elle, contrainte par la présence et l'abondance du TRG, cette contrainte diminuant à mesure que le TRG décline et abandonne les migrations vers les aires d'hivernages communes aux deux troupeaux. Cette thèse améliore notre compréhension de l'influence des facteurs environnementaux sur la phénologie et les patrons de migration du caribou migrateur. Ces connaissances sont très utiles pour comprendre l'impact des changements climatiques et établir les plans de conservation pour les espèces migratrices.

# Abstract

Several populations of migratory species are actually declining. Climate changes affect the habitat of migratory species and the phenology of natural processes, and impact the migration, a critical period for migratory species. Thus, it is crucial to understand how environmental and climatic variables affect the timing and the patterns of migration. This thesis assesses the impact of climate, food resources and competition on the spring and fall migrations of migratory caribou, *Rangifer tarandus*, from the Rivière-George (RGH) and Rivière-aux-Feuilles (RFH) herds, in Northern Québec and Labrador. The first part of my thesis presents an objective approach, based on the detection of changes in the structure of seasonal movements, to assess the departure and the arrival dates of the migrations. The approach was validated on simulated paths, and was then applied on the spring and fall migrations of female caribou. The second part focuses on the impact of environmental conditions on the phenology of the spring and fall migrations. It revealed that migration is mainly affected by the climatic conditions encountered during migration, snow conditions partly determining the cost of movements. In the spring, caribou suffer from adverse conditions when the snowmelt is early. In the fall, caribou adjust their movements and migrate faster when snowfall occurs early to limit the cost of moving through deep snow. The third part of my thesis focuses on fall migration patterns and revealed that migration patterns are mainly affected by intra- and inter-herds competition for the winter ranges. Caribou from RGH migrate preferentially toward the furthest winter ranges in response to increased competition, linked with a high population size, limiting the competition on the closest winter ranges. The use of the winter ranges by caribou from RFH is constrained by the abundance of RGH. This constraint decreased as RGH declined and abandoned the migrations toward the winter ranges commonly used by both herds. My thesis increases our knowledge of the environmental factors that affect the phenology and patterns of caribou migrations. This knowledge is useful to understand the impact of climate changes and establish conservation plans for migratory species.

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Je terminerai enfin par un petit mot pour Barbara. La fin d'un doctorat c'est une bonne dose de stress, mais tu as réussi à rendre cette période particulièrement agréable et puis grâce à toi j'ai trouvé la meilleure raison pour rester dans le coin un peu plus longtemps!

## Avant-propos

Ma thèse porte sur l'impact du climat, de la ressource alimentaire et de la taille de population sur la phénologie et les patrons de migration des caribous migrants, *Rangifer tarandus*, des troupeaux Rivière-George et Rivière-aux-Feuilles dans le Nord-du-Québec et au Labrador. Elle comporte 5 chapitres incluant un chapitre d'introduction et un chapitre de conclusion en français ainsi que 3 chapitres sous forme d'articles scientifiques, rédigés en anglais. Je suis l'auteur principal de chacun de ces 5 chapitres et de fait, le principal responsable de la revue de littérature et de la mise en place des questions de recherche abordées. Les données de suivi Argos utilisées tout au long de cette thèse s'inscrivent dans le programme de suivi à long terme des caribous migrants mené conjointement par Caribou Ungava et le Ministère, des Forêts, de la Faune et des Parcs du Québec. J'ai participé à la pose des colliers et effectué la mise en forme de la base de données de localisations, la recherche et la mise en forme des données environnementales et climatiques, les analyses des différents articles, l'interprétation des résultats et la rédaction des articles scientifiques.

Le premier chapitre de ma thèse consiste en une revue de littérature sur la migration, ainsi que sur les facteurs environnementaux et anthropiques qui affectent les populations migratrices. J'y définis dans un premier temps la migration, comment les individus sont capables d'ajuster la phénologie et leurs patrons de déplacements en migration, et je décris les impacts des changements climatiques et du développement anthropique sur les migrations. J'aborde ensuite le cas du caribou migrant et des menaces spécifiques qui pèsent sur ses migrations. Je termine en présentant les objectifs de ma thèse. Les chapitres 2, 3 et 4 ont été rédigés en collaboration avec Steve D. Côté, mon directeur de thèse, professeur au département de Biologie de l'université Laval, et Christian Dussault, mon co-directeur, chercheur au Ministère, des Forêts, de la Faune et des Parcs du Québec. Le chapitre 2, "**Detecting changes in the annual movements of terrestrial migratory species: using the first-passage time to document the spring migration of caribou**", est un chapitre méthodologique dans lequel je développe une approche objective pour identifier les dates de départ et d'arrivée en migrations, dates qui seront utilisées dans les chapitres suivants. Il a été publié dans la revue scientifique *Movement Ecology* en 2014.

Dans le chapitre 3, "**Climate change and variations in the timing of the spring and fall migrations of a long-distance migrant ungulate**", je mets en évidence un impact du climat sur la phénologie de la migration, notamment des conditions climatiques rencontrées lors de la migration via un effet de la neige sur les coûts de déplacement. Au printemps, les caribous subissent les mauvaises conditions climatiques qui retarderont leur arrivée sur les aires de mises bas alors qu'à l'automne ils semblent capables d'ajuster leur migration pour limiter l'impact de conditions climatiques défavorables. Ce chapitre sera soumis prochainement à la revue scientifique *Journal of Mammalogy*. Dans le chapitre 4, "**Where to spend the winter? The role of intraspecific competition and climate in determining the selection of wintering areas by migratory caribou**", j'utilise une approche par Forêts aléatoires pour identifier les facteurs affectant le choix de la destination des migrations d'automne. J'y mets en évidence un effet majeur des tailles de population des deux troupeaux indiquant une compétition intra- et inter-troupeaux pour les aires d'hivernages. Je prévois de soumettre ce chapitre à la revue scientifique *Ecology*. Finalement, dans le cinquième et dernier chapitre de ma thèse je termine par une synthèse des principales conclusions des chapitres 2, 3 et 4, ainsi que par les limites et les perspectives de recherche que soulève mon étude.

Bien que non présentés dans le présent mémoire, j'ai également participé dans le cadre de ma thèse et en temps que co-auteur, à la rédaction et à la relecture d'un chapitre de livre : "**Caribou herd dynamics: impacts of climate change on traditional and sport harvesting**" de Steeve D. Côté et collaborateurs dans *Nunavik and Nunatsiavut: From science to policy. An Integrated Regional Impact Study (IRIS) of climate change and modernization* publié en 2012 par ArcticNet; ainsi qu'à la rédaction et la relecture de deux articles scientifiques : "**Temporally dynamic habitat suitability predicts genetic relatedness among caribou**", publié en 2014 dans *Proceedings of the Royal Society* par Glenn Yannick et collaborateurs, et "**Detecting collective behavior in animal relocation data, with application to migratory caribou**", publié en 2016 dans *Methods in Ecology and Evolution* par Benjamin D. Dalziel et collaborateurs.

# **CHAPITRE 1**

## **Introduction générale**

La migration est l'un des comportements les plus incroyables du monde animal. Elle fascine de par sa régularité, de nombreuses espèces revenant tous les ans, aux mêmes dates, sur les mêmes aires d'estivage ou d'hivernage, mais également de par les distances parcourues et de par son ampleur. Certains mammifères terrestres parcourent des milliers de kilomètres et certains oiseaux marins effectuent le voyage entre les deux pôles. Ces mouvements migratoires peuvent impliquer des dizaines de milliers d'individus, comme on peut l'observer chez les ongulés d'Afrique ou chez certains insectes. Malheureusement, les espèces migratrices doivent faire face à une empreinte croissante de l'homme sur la Terre, l'espèce humaine empiétant de plus en plus sur les habitats naturels et des milieux qui autrefois n'étaient pas propices au développement de la société humaine. Les habitats nordiques, par exemple, deviennent de plus en plus accessibles et font face à une anthropisation grandissante. De manière moins directe, l'empreinte humaine se traduit aussi par les changements climatiques globaux (IPCC 2014). Que ce soit par des changements dans les régimes de précipitations ou via une modification des températures, la répartition spatiale de nombreuses espèces et la phénologie de grands processus écologiques sont affectés. De fait, on observe depuis plusieurs décennies un déclin dramatique des populations migratrices, touchant aussi bien les oiseaux (Møller et al. 2008, Both et al. 2010) et les mammifères (Bolger et al. 2008, Harris et al. 2009), que les autres taxons (Wilcove & Wikelski 2008, Robinson et al. 2009). Chez certaines espèces, ce déclin s'accompagne d'une perte du comportement de migration (Harris et al. 2009, Robinson et al. 2009).

Un des principaux défis en écologie animale est justement de comprendre le lien entre les variations dans la répartition et l'abondance d'une espèce et les variations de l'environnement. Le lien entre la répartition d'une espèce et l'environnement se fait notamment via le comportement de sélection de l'habitat par lequel les individus répondent à leurs besoins alimentaires, de protection contre les prédateurs et de reproduction (Mysterud & Østbye 1995, Rettie & Messier 2000). De cette sélection de l'habitat va découler l'utilisation de l'espace d'une espèce et par conséquent sa répartition, qu'elle se fasse à l'échelle de l'individu via l'établissement des domaines vitaux ou à l'échelle d'une population via l'établissement des aires de répartition (Johnson 1980).

## **La migration : un suivi des variations saisonnières à large échelle**

### *Échelle en sélection d'habitat*

La notion d'échelle, spatiale ou temporelle, est essentielle en sélection d'habitat (*e.g.* Schaefer & Messier 1995, McLoughlin et al. 2002, Hebblewhite & Merrill 2007). Les échelles spatiales étant indissociables des échelles temporelles (Mayor et al. 2009), les grandes échelles spatiales correspondent souvent à des décisions ayant une répercussion sur de longues périodes temporelles (*e.g.* aires saisonnières). Rettie & Messier (2000) suggèrent que la sélection d'habitat est un processus hiérarchique où la sélection à chaque échelle serait reliée à l'importance relative des différents facteurs limitant la valeur adaptative des individus. Les individus devraient sélectionner dans un premier temps leur habitat à large échelle en fonction du facteur limitant le plus leur valeur adaptative puis, une fois l'effet de ce facteur réduit, la sélection aux échelles plus fines pourrait alors viser à minimiser les effets des autres facteurs ayant une influence moindre. Selon l'espèce, ces facteurs limitants vont varier, mais ils sont généralement liés à la disponibilité des ressources alimentaires (McLoughlin et al. 2002) et au risque de prédation (Rettie & Messier 2000). C'est notamment le cas pour plusieurs espèces d'ongulés, où la sélection de l'habitat à large échelle semble viser la diminution du risque de prédation (*e.g.* orignal, *Alces alces*, Dussault et al. 2005, caribou, *Rangifer tarandus*, Gustine et al. 2006, sanglier, *Sus scrofa*, Tolon et al. 2009) par le biais du comportement de migration (Fryxell et al. 1988) ou par la sélection de sites de mise bas en fonction de la topographie (Bergerud et al. 1990, Rettie & Messier 2000). La sélection de parcelles d'habitat riches en nourriture ne s'opère alors que dans un second temps, à plus fine échelle.

### *Définition de la migration*

La migration est un des plus importants mécanismes de sélection d'habitat à large échelle que l'on observe chez de nombreux taxons (oiseaux, Alerstam 2011; mammifères terrestres, Teitelbaum et al. 2015; mammifères marins, Bailleul et al. 2012; reptiles, Hays et al. 2006; poissons, Brodersen et al. 2012; insectes, Chapman et al. 2008). La migration peut se définir comme un mouvement périodique d'une population ou d'un individu entre deux aires disjointes dont les ressources varient de manière saisonnière et prévisible (Mueller & Fagan 2008). La migration implique que ce mouvement soit directionnel, plus grand que les déplacements journaliers et prioritaire sur les autres comportements, occasionnant alors une redistribution de la population au sein de son aire annuelle (Dingle & Drake 2007). Il



convient de faire la différence entre la migration chez les espèces sémelpares et chez les espèces itéropares (Ramenofsky & Wingfield 2007). Chez les premières, telles que les poissons diadromes, passant une partie de leur cycle vital en eau douce et l'autre partie en mer, ou de nombreux insectes (Ramenofsky & Wingfield 2007, Bauer et al. 2011), le cycle de migration ne se fait qu'une fois au cours de la vie, chaque étape du cycle migratoire correspondant à une étape dans le développement de l'individu (larve, jeune, adulte reproducteur). La migration au niveau d'une population peut même impliquer plusieurs générations comme c'est le cas chez le monarque, *Danaus plexippus*, où les individus se reproduisent puis meurent au fur et à mesure de leur montée annuelle vers le nord, la nouvelle génération prenant le relais de la migration (Flockhart et al. 2013). La migration chez les espèces itéropares, telle qu'on l'observe chez la plupart des oiseaux et des mammifères migrants, se répète, quant à elle, tout au long de la vie de l'individu (Ramenofsky & Wingfield 2007). Celle-ci s'opère généralement entre une aire d'hivernage et une aire d'élevage (e.g. aire de ponte, de mise bas), le changement saisonnier d'aires pouvant s'effectuer sur de larges échelles géographiques (Bekenov et al. 1998, Berthold et al. 2004, Dias et al. 2011) ou selon un gradient d'altitude (Mysterud et al. 2011).

#### *Coûts et bénéfices de la migration*

Le comportement de migration est généralement associé à une réponse aux variations spatio-temporelles des ressources ou des menaces (Cresswell et al. 2011). La migration des individus est expliquée par trois principales motivations (Bolger et al. 2008) : suivre les variations saisonnières dans l'abondance et la disponibilité des ressources alimentaires (Fryxell & Sinclair 1988, Bischof et al. 2012), accéder à des ressources particulièrement limitantes telles que l'eau dans les milieux tropicaux (Murray 1995) et diminuer le risque de prédation ainsi que l'exposition aux insectes et aux parasites (Piersma 1997, McKinnon et al. 2010). Cependant, ces raisons ne sont pas exclusives et une espèce migrant vers une aire afin de limiter la prédation sur les jeunes peut synchroniser son arrivée avec le pic d'émergence des ressources, comme c'est le cas chez le caribou (Fancy & Whitten 1991, Post et al. 2003) et chez l'antilope d'Amérique, *Antilocapra americana* (White et al. 2007). Dans ces exemples, la migration permet de maximiser le succès

reproducteur des individus et la survie juvénile (Bolger et al. 2008), deux paramètres critiques dans la dynamique d'une population (Gaillard et al. 2000).

Malgré ses avantages, la migration représente un coût car les déplacements migratoires requièrent une grande dépense énergétique (Wikelski et al. 2003). Au cours de leur migration, les individus vont chercher à minimiser le coût des déplacements en utilisant par exemple les vents dominants chez les oiseaux (Alerstam 2011), ou en se déplaçant sur les lacs et les rivières gelés chez le caribou (Fancy & White 1987, Duquette 1988). Des conditions climatiques particulières rencontrées lors de la migration peuvent augmenter les dépenses énergétiques et affecter la condition corporelle des individus et, ultimement, le succès reproducteur (Gaillard et al. 2000) et la survie (Festa-Bianchet et al. 1998). Par ailleurs, la traversé d'habitats peu connus peut augmenter les risques de blessure et de mortalité, notamment lors de migrations de masse (Sinclair 1983), ainsi que les risques de prédation. En effet, les individus en migration sont particulièrement exposés aux prédateurs, et les taux de prédation observés en migration sont parfois les plus élevés de l'année (Hebblewhite & Merrill 2007, 2009). La migration est donc une période critique du cycle annuel (Bolger et al. 2008).

#### *Un comportement variable*

La perception classique de la migration dépeint un mouvement obligatoire et hautement prédictif entre deux aires saisonnières, les individus démontrant de la fidélité à leurs aires saisonnières et étant très constants dans la phénologie de leur migration (Newton 2012). Cependant, cette vision est vraisemblablement plus une exception que la norme (Bauer et al. 2011). Les mouvements migratoires peuvent s'avérer beaucoup moins prévisibles et les stratégies de migrations peuvent varier entre les individus ou entre les années (Newton 2012). Au sein d'une population, certains individus peuvent être résidents, d'autres migrants (*e.g.* Hebblewhite & Merrill 2009, Mysterud et al. 2011). Les migrations sont alors dites partielles et la proportion de migrants est souvent positivement liée à un effet de densité-dépendance, via la compétition pour les ressources menant à une diminution de la disponibilité des ressources sur l'aire de départ (Chapman et al. 2011). L'inverse peut aussi être observé, c'est-à-dire une augmentation des résidents, si une forte

compétition est attendue sur l'aire d'arrivée (Myserud et al. 2011). Certains individus ne sont pas strictement migrants ou strictement résidents, mais adoptent l'une ou l'autre de ces stratégies en fonction des conditions locales (Nelson 1998, Myserud et al. 2011). La migration est alors considérée comme facultative (Newton 2012). Cependant, la définition de migration facultative ne se limite pas seulement au fait de partir ou non en migration une année mais peut porter sur une portion de la migration ou sur la flexibilité dans la phénologie des départs et des arrivées et les aires utilisées. Chez la cigogne blanche, *Ciconia ciconia*, le départ en migration ainsi que la voie empruntée au début de la migration d'automne ne varient pas d'une année à l'autre et correspondent à la composante obligatoire de la migration (Berthold et al. 2004). L'aire d'arrivée est par contre variable : un même individu peut hiverner en Afrique de l'Est une année, puis hiverner plusieurs milliers de kilomètres plus au sud en Afrique du Sud l'année suivante (Berthold et al. 2004). Alors que les migrations obligatoires, ou composantes obligatoires de la migration, sont fortement contrôlées par des facteurs endogènes, les migrations facultatives semblent dépendre plus des conditions environnementales (Ramenofsky et al. 2012). Enfin, dans le cas des migrations différentielles, c'est le statut des individus qui déterminent leurs stratégies de migration (Cristol et al. 1999). Par exemple, la phénologie de la migration peut varier selon le sexe et l'âge des individus (Bai & Schmidt 2012), ou les mâles et femelles peuvent migrer vers des aires différentes en dehors de la période de reproduction (Duijns et al. 2014).

#### *Arriver au bon endroit, au bon moment*

Même si on peut observer de la variabilité dans les aires saisonnières utilisées ainsi qu'une certaine flexibilité dans les dates de départ et d'arrivée, les migrations répondent aux besoins saisonniers des individus. Par exemple, l'arrivée sur les aires d'élevage coïncide généralement avec l'émergence des ressources nécessaires à l'élevage des jeunes, le pic de productivité végétale ou d'émergence des insectes étant essentiel pour assurer les apports énergétiques aux juvéniles (Jonzén et al. 2007, Post & Forchhammer 2008). Il est donc essentiel que les déplacements à large échelle soient synchronisés avec les changements saisonniers des ressources. Les individus doivent donc utiliser différents indices afin de déterminer le moment du départ en migration ou d'ajuster leurs déplacements en fonction

de l'avancement dans l'émergence des ressources. Chez de nombreuses d'espèces, notamment, l'interaction entre les cycles endogènes (e.g. cycle hormonaux) propres aux individus et des indices externes fiables et constants, tels que la photopériode, vont permettre de déclencher les différentes phases de la migration, à savoir l'initiation, le départ et la migration en tant que telle (Ramenofsky & Wingfield 2007, Helm et al. 2013). La phase d'initiation implique des changements physiologiques complexes comme la mise en place de réserves corporelles ou de structures musculaires permettant les déplacements sur de longues distances. Elle est donc sous un fort contrôle endogène (Bauer et al. 2011). Pour le départ en migration, par contre, l'utilisation d'indices environnementaux plus variables comme le climat local ou la disponibilité des ressources (Gordo et al. 2005, Saino et al. 2007) permet aux individus de s'ajuster afin de migrer dans des conditions favorables (Visser et al. 2010). En cours de migration, l'utilisation d'indices environnementaux, tels que l'abondance des ressources sur les haltes migratoires, permet aux individus d'ajuster leur vitesse de déplacements et par conséquent leur arrivée sur l'aire d'élevage (Tøttrup et al. 2008). Chez les espèces traquant les changements dans la disponibilité des ressources, la vitesse de la migration va dépendre de la vitesse d'émergence des ressources tout au long du trajet migratoire (van der Graaf et al. 2006, Bischof et al. 2012).

Afin d'arriver à destination, les individus ont à disposition différents indices environnementaux. L'utilisation des indices comme le soleil, les étoiles ou les champs magnétiques vont donner aux individus une direction générale à leur mouvement migratoire (Ramenofsky & Wingfield 2007) et des indices plus locaux peuvent leur indiquer leur progression le long du trajet migratoire (Ramenofsky & Wingfield 2007). Dans certains cas, les individus vont disposer d'une véritable carte cognitive des routes de migration inscrite dans leurs gènes ou acquise lors de leurs premières migrations auprès de leurs congénères (Ramenofsky & Wingfield 2007, Mueller & Fagan 2008). Cependant, pour de nombreuses espèces le choix de la destination n'est pas fixe et est soumis aux variations de l'environnement. Si on observe généralement une relative fidélité aux aires de reproduction (Dias et al. 2011, Morrison & Bolger 2012, Taillon et al. 2012b), l'utilisation des aires d'hivernage peut s'avérer beaucoup plus variable entre les individus d'une même population (Williams et al. 2008) ou entre les années pour un individu donné (Berthold et al. 2004,

Dias et al. 2011). Cette variation peut dépendre à la fois de facteurs endogènes et des conditions environnementales.

En raison du coût énergétique de la migration, l'accès aux aires lointaines peut dépendre de la condition corporelle des individus (Bauer et al. 2010, Bogdanova et al. 2011, Müller et al. 2014). Celle-ci est affectée par les conditions rencontrées sur l'aire de départ (Bogdanova et al. 2011) mais également lors de la migration. En effet, de mauvaises conditions climatiques (Gordo 2007, Robinson et al. 2009) ou une pénurie de ressources sur les haltes migratoires (Bauer et al. 2010) vont limiter la capacité des individus à atteindre les aires les plus éloignées. Par ailleurs, un accès réduit aux ressources sur les aires d'arrivée induit par de mauvaises conditions climatiques (Bekenov et al. 1998) ou par un effet de densité-dépendance via une compétition accrue (Alonso et al. 1994) peut amener un changement de destination. Dans certains cas, c'est la dégradation de certaines aires suite à une utilisation passée qui va pousser les individus à migrer vers d'autres aires les années suivantes (Ferguson & Messier 2000). Enfin, lorsque la migration n'a pas de destination précise, la direction prise par les individus, tout comme la vitesse des déplacements, peut être fonction des patrons d'émergence des ressources (Newton 2012) ou des précipitation dans les milieux arides (Morrison & Bolger 2012).

## **Déclin des espèces migratrices et changement des comportements de migration**

Qu'il s'agisse d'oiseaux, de mammifères ou d'autres taxons, de nombreux articles récents font état de la mauvaise santé des populations migratrices (*e.g.* Bolger et al. 2008, Møller et al. 2008, Robinson et al. 2009, Both et al. 2010). Les déclin de populations ainsi que les changements ou abandons du comportement de migration observés ont principalement été imputés aux changements climatiques et aux activités anthropiques (Wilcove & Wikelski 2008, Harris et al. 2009, Robinson et al. 2009).

### *Impacts des changements climatiques*

Les changements climatiques touchent l'ensemble des régions et des écosystèmes du globe, mais leurs impacts se font davantage ressentir dans les environnements nordiques

où l'augmentation des températures est deux fois plus rapide qu'ailleurs dans le monde (Gilg et al. 2012, IPCC 2014). Les modèles prévoient également des changements dans les régimes de précipitation, ainsi qu'une augmentation des événements climatiques extrêmes (IPCC 2014). Ces changements climatiques affecteront la répartition et la dynamique des espèces animales migratrices de manières directe et indirecte (Mysterud et al. 2003, Sharma et al. 2009). Un changement dans la répartition des ressources vers des latitudes et des altitudes plus hautes (Piersma 1997) pourrait provoquer un déplacement des habitats d'été, induisant des migrations plus longues (Moore et al. 2003). Ces modifications d'habitat peuvent également survenir sur les haltes migratoires, une altération des ressources affectant alors la capacité des individus à achever leur migration (Sanderson et al. 2006, Kellermann & van Riper 2015). Une fréquence plus élevées des événements climatiques extrêmes, tels que les tempêtes pour les oiseaux, peut également augmenter les risques de mortalité lors de la migration (Butler 2000) ou provoquer un retard à l'arrivée ou même forcer les individus à retourner vers l'aire d'hivernage (Senner et al. 2015). Cependant, l'impact le plus important sur les espèces migratrices semble relié à un changement dans la phénologie des processus naturels (Møller et al. 2008, Post & Forchhammer 2008) avec notamment un avancement progressif de la date d'émergence des ressources (Parmesan & Yohe 2003).

Les ressources émergeant plus tôt, si les dates d'arrivée des espèces migratrices sur les aires d'élevage ne changent pas, un décalage entre le moment où les ressources sont les plus abondantes et où les femelles en ont le plus besoin peut survenir. Un tel décalage a déjà pu être observé chez les oiseaux migrateurs (Møller et al. 2008) et les mammifères terrestres (Post & Forchhammer 2008) ou marins (Anderson et al. 2013), avec des répercussions négatives sur la survie et le succès reproducteur des individus (Møller et al. 2008, Post & Forchhammer 2008). Ce constat est d'autant plus alarmant pour les espèces migrant sur de longues distances (Møller et al. 2008, Both et al. 2010). En effet, le rythme des changements sur l'aire d'hivernage n'est pas forcément le même que celui des ressources sur l'aire d'élevage, cette différence s'accroissant avec la distance entre les deux aires (Robinson et al. 2009, Gilg et al. 2012). De plus, certains indices environnementaux déclenchant la migration sont indépendants du climat sur l'aire d'élevage comme, par

exemple, la photopériode. Ainsi, bien qu'un avancement dans les dates de départ et d'arrivée pour de nombreuses espèces soit observé (Tøttrup et al. 2006, Gordo 2007), ce changement dans la phénologie des migrations peut ne pas être suffisant pour s'ajuster aux changements de la saison d'abondance des ressources (Post & Forchhammer 2008). Les changements climatiques vont également affecter la phénologie de la migration d'automne. Les espèces effectuant des migrations à courtes distances vont avoir tendance à retarder leur départ tant que les conditions sur l'aire d'estivage demeurent favorables (Jenni & Kéry 2003, Gordo 2007). Elles vont ensuite migrer progressivement à mesure que les conditions se dégradent (Jenni & Kéry 2003, Gordo 2007). Les espèces effectuant des migrations à longues distances, par contre, semblent partir plus tôt en anticipation des conditions de migration (Jenni & Kéry 2003, Gordo 2007). C'est le cas par exemple des oiseaux hivernant au sud du Sahara, en Afrique du Nord, qui avancent leur migration d'automne afin de traverser le Sahel avant que débute la saison sèche et ainsi éviter des conditions de migration défavorables (Jenni & Kéry 2003).

#### *Impacts du développement anthropique*

Les activités humaines affectent les populations migratrices indirectement via les changements climatiques, mais elles ont également des impacts beaucoup plus directs. L'expansion croissante des infrastructures humaines, des terres agricoles, des réseaux de transport routier ou de transport d'énergie, ainsi que de l'exploitation des ressources naturelles a contribué à la disparition, à la dégradation et au morcellement des habitats. Ces perturbations du milieu peuvent se traduire par une perte des habitats saisonniers par destruction directe (Wilcove & Wikelski 2008, Harris et al. 2009) mais également par un comportement d'évitement de larges zones autour des structures anthropiques (Vistnes & Nellemann 2008). Chez les ongulés, des perturbations sur les aires de mise bas, même minimales (Nellemann & Cameron 1998), peuvent pousser les individus à abandonner ces aires et à se rabattre sur des habitats de moins bonne qualité (Nellemann et al. 2001). Cela peut se traduire par une réduction de la survie juvénile ou adulte qui se répercutera sur la dynamique de la population (Leblond et al. 2013, Leclerc et al. 2014). Cependant, dans certaines situations, les conditions sur les aires saisonnières peuvent également s'améliorer via un accès facilité aux cultures ou un apport anthropique de ressources (Hebblewhite et

al. 2006, Peterson & Messmer 2007, Jones et al. 2014). Une amélioration des habitats d'hiver, par exemple, peut diminuer la proportion de migrants au printemps (Hebblewhite et al. 2006) ou modifier la phénologie de la migration et de l'utilisation des aires saisonnières (Peterson & Messmer 2007), les animaux prolongeant leur séjour sur l'aire d'hivernage au détriment du temps passé sur l'aire d'estivage (Hebblewhite et al. 2006, Jones et al. 2014).

La fragmentation et la modification des habitats ont également un impact sur la sélection des trajectoires de migration, notamment chez les espèces effectuant des migrations terrestres (Mahoney & Schaefer 2002a, Blum et al. 2015). Ainsi, l'évitement de structures anthropiques peut pousser les individus à modifier leurs routes migratoires ou à utiliser des habitats perturbés (Mahoney & Schaefer 2002a, Blum et al. 2015) et peut mener à une augmentation des dépenses énergétiques (Blum et al. 2015) et des risques de mortalité (Coe et al. 2015). Dans certains cas, ces perturbations peuvent même mener à la disparition du comportement de migration (Wilcove & Wikelski 2008, Harris et al. 2009), les routes ou les clôtures d'élevage agissant comme des barrières aux déplacements des individus (Seidler et al. 2015). Dans la région de Yellowstone, par exemple, 75% des routes de migration du bison, *Bison bison*, du wapiti, *Cervus elaphus*, et de l'antilope d'Amérique ont disparu (Berger 2004).

## **Décrire les migrations**

Afin de comprendre l'impact des changements climatiques et du développement humain sur les migrations et de prendre les mesures de conservation adéquates, il est essentiel dans un premier temps d'identifier et de décrire les patrons de migration (Wilcove & Wikelski 2008, Harris et al. 2009). Plusieurs paramètres peuvent être déterminés pour décrire les migrations comme la distance parcourue, la durée de la migration, les dates de départ et d'arrivée, mais également la localisation des aires saisonnières et des corridors de migration. Lorsque les aires saisonnières sont clairement définies spatialement il est aisé d'identifier les départs et arrivées en migration et ainsi de définir la phénologie de la migration (Mahoney & Schaefer 2002a, Mitchell et al. 2012). De même, les dates de passage à des points géographiques obligatoires sur le trajet migratoire ou à des méridiens et latitudes peuvent fournir une indication sur le retard ou l'avancement de la migration



(Stanley et al. 2012). Cependant chez certaines espèces la localisation de ces aires saisonnières et des routes migratoires peut varier d'une année à l'autre. Par exemple, le caribou migrateur peut montrer une faible fidélité à son domaine vital hivernal (Schaefer et al. 2000), amenant de grandes variations dans la localisation de l'aire d'hivernage d'une année à l'autre (Schmelzer & Otto 2003, Couturier et al. 2009b). Dans une moindre mesure les aires de mise bas des caribous peuvent également varier (Gunn et al. 2008, Taillon et al. 2012b). Dès lors, utiliser des aires ou des repères géographiques fixes pour identifier les départs et arrivées en migration n'est pas approprié. Une alternative peut être d'examiner les changements dans la structure des déplacements (*e.g.* vitesse, direction) afin d'identifier des patrons saisonniers dans le comportement des individus (Gurarie et al. 2016) et ainsi de déterminer les périodes de migration (*e.g.* Bailleul et al. 2012).

L'avènement, au cours des dernières décennies, des outils de suivis télémétriques des animaux s'est accompagné du développement de méthodes permettant d'analyser les déplacements des individus (Schick et al. 2008, Gurarie et al. 2016). Ces méthodes permettent notamment d'identifier des changements dans l'échelle ou les patrons de déplacement et de lier ces changements au comportement de l'animal ou à l'hétérogénéité de l'habitat (*e.g.* Fauchald & Tveraa 2003, Frair et al. 2005). Les changements de patrons de mouvements en fonction des échelles spatiales peuvent être détectés à l'aide d'analyses fractales (Nams 2005) ou de modèles comportementaux multi-échelles (Johnson et al. 2002). À ces différentes échelles peuvent alors être associés des comportements tels que l'alimentation, les déplacements à longue distance ou le repos (Johnson et al. 2002, Fritz et al. 2003). Les approches bayésiennes (*e.g.* *Hidden Markov Model*, Morales et al. 2004, *State-Space-Models*, Jonsen et al. 2005) cherchent, quant à elles, à ajuster des modèles de déplacements, composés de marches aléatoires corrélées correspondant à différents comportements, aux trajets réels des individus, et l'analyse des points de changements comportementaux (*Behavioural Change Point Analysis*, Gurarie et al. 2009) cherche à découper les déplacements en identifiant des changements dans les valeurs des différents paramètres de mouvement. Enfin la méthode du temps de premier passage (*First-Passage Time*, FPT, Fauchald & Tveraa 2003) mesure l'effort de recherche alimentaire le long d'un trajet et permet de discriminer les déplacements entre déplacements à longue distance et

activité d'alimentation (Pinaud & Weimerskirch 2007) en identifiant les zones où l'individu concentre son effort de recherche alimentaire (Kareiva & Odell 1987). À large échelle le FPT peut permettre d'identifier les aires saisonnières (zone de recherche intensive) et les routes migratoires (déplacements à longue distance). Le passage d'une valeur de FPT haute attendue sur l'aire de résidence à une valeur de FPT basse observée durant la migration peut alors être utilisé pour déterminer les dates de départ et d'arrivée des migrations (Bailleul et al. 2012). En l'absence de repères spatiaux définis, la détection des changements dans la structure des déplacements de l'animal, à l'aide des méthodes précédemment citées, permet d'identifier les phases de migration. Il devient alors possible d'étudier la phénologie et les patrons de migration.

## **Le caribou migrateur**

Parmi les mammifères effectuant des migrations terrestres, le caribou migrateur est l'un de ceux parcourant les plus grandes distances (Teitelbaum et al. 2015). Animal emblématique et indicateur de l'état des écosystèmes nordiques (Kofinas et al. 2003), il est une espèce clé aussi bien d'un point de vue social, économique et culturel, que d'un point de vue écologique. Au Québec, les nations inuites, cries, naskapiés et innues ont évolué en présence du caribou et elles ont développé un lien très étroit avec cette espèce. En particulier, le caribou constitue leur principale source de nourriture et on estime qu'environ 10 000 individus sont prélevés chaque année (Jean & Lamontagne 2005). Parallèlement, l'exploitation commerciale et la chasse sportive génèrent des retombées économiques significatives pour les communautés locales et les pourvoiries. Cependant, on constate actuellement un déclin de la majorité des populations de caribous et rennes à travers le monde (Vors & Boyce 2009, Festa-Bianchet et al. 2011). Même si de grandes fluctuations d'abondance ont pu être observées sur de nombreux troupeaux au cours des siècles passés (Meldgaard 1986, Valkenburg et al. 2003, Dau 2005), ce déclin global est particulièrement alarmant et plusieurs populations de caribous font l'objet de mesures de conservation croissantes (Festa-Bianchet et al. 2011, Yannic et al. 2016).

La prédation (Bergerud 1974), la chasse (Banfield & Tener 1958), le climat (Crête & Payette 1990) ou encore la disponibilité des ressources dans les habitats d'hiver (Messier

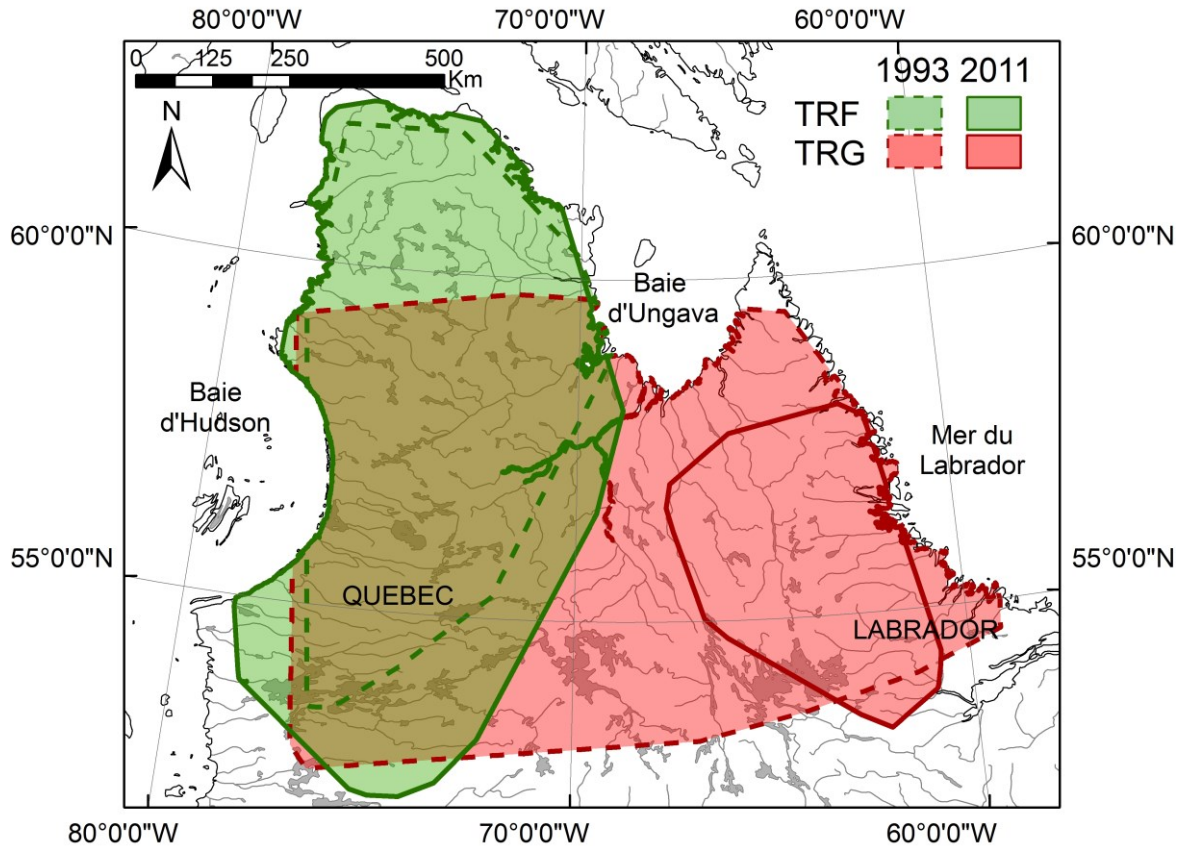
et al. 1988) et d'été (Crête & Huot 1993) ont été invoquées pour expliquer les grandes variations démographiques observées par le passé chez le caribou. La disponibilité des ressources a notamment un impact fort sur la fécondité et la survie juvénile, composantes démographiques fortement liées à la croissance d'une population (Gaillard et al. 2000, Bonenfant et al. 2009). Or, cette disponibilité des ressources est affectée par les changements climatiques ainsi que par l'augmentation de l'empreinte humaine dans les milieux nordiques (Vors & Boyce 2009, Festa-Bianchet et al. 2011). Par exemple, les ressources émergent plus tôt à cause d'une fonte des neiges précoce (Parmesan & Yohe 2003), une perte de synchronie entre l'arrivée sur les aires de mise bas et le pic de productivité végétale a pu être observée au Groenland, affectant négativement le succès reproducteur des femelles (Post & Forchhammer 2008). En hiver, une augmentation des événements de pluie sur la neige peut provoquer la formation d'une couche de glace, rendant les ressources hivernales inaccessibles (Miller & Gunn 2003, Tyler 2010). C'est notamment ce qui a causé la perte, à la fin des années 1990, de 98% des effectifs du Caribou de Peary dans le Haut Arctique canadien (Miller & Gunn 2003). En revanche, une fonte suffisante du couvert nival pour faciliter l'accès aux ressources hivernales peut également avoir un effet positif sur la survie et la fécondité (Tyler et al. 2008).

Les changements climatiques ont également des effets moins directs sur les ressources. Ils peuvent par exemple affecter les ressources hivernales et estivales via un changement dans la composition des communautés végétales. Les changements dans l'activité photosynthétique des végétaux indiquent une augmentation des plantes vasculaires et des mousses au détriment des lichens (Olthof et al. 2008), élément clé de l'alimentation hivernale du caribou. L'évitement lié à la présence d'infrastructures humaines peut également limiter l'accès aux ressources (Vistnes & Nellemann 2008). En Norvège, les activités touristiques et industrielles poussent les rennes à se concentrer dans des zones éloignées des infrastructures (Nellemann et al. 2001). Les habitats utilisés présentent alors un couvert en lichens plus faible qu'aux alentours des installations humaines, la forte concentration d'individus dans les zones éloignées contribuant à une dégradation plus rapide de la ressource.

Enfin, les changements climatiques et le développement anthropique ont également un impact sur les déplacements des caribous lors de la migration. La dépense d'énergie augmentant avec la profondeur d'enfoncement dans la neige (Parker et al. 1984, Fancy & White 1987), une fonte précoce de la neige lors de la migration ou une neige poudreuse liée à des précipitations abondantes pourrait occasionner une augmentation des coûts de déplacement (Weladji & Holand 2006). Par ailleurs, les caribous utilisant les lacs et les rivières gelés pour faciliter leurs déplacements (Fancy & White 1987, Duquette 1988), un changement dans les périodes de gel et dégel des lacs, rivières et bras de mer pourrait ralentir, voir bloquer certaines migrations, les individus devant attendre des conditions d'englacement favorables pour limiter les risques de blessure et de noyade lors de la traversée (Miller & Gunn 1986, Poole et al. 2010). Les déplacements lors des migrations peuvent également être altérés par la présence d'infrastructures humaines. À Terre-Neuve, les caribous du troupeau du plateau de Buchans ont dévié leur route de migration traditionnelle en réponse à la construction d'un barrage hydroélectrique (Mahoney & Schaefer 2002a). De la même manière, la construction de parcs éoliens a poussé les rennes du troupeau de Marå en Suède, à abandonner leur corridor de migration traditionnel, augmentant par la même occasion leurs dépenses énergétiques (Skarin et al. 2015).

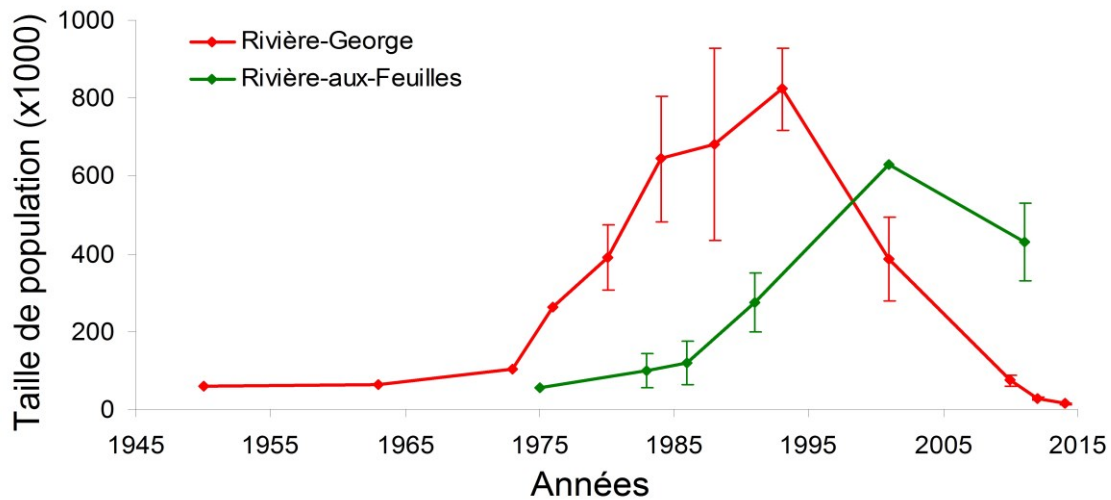
## **Contexte de l'étude**

Dans le nord du Québec et au Labrador, les troupeaux de caribous migrateurs de la Rivière-George (TRG) et de la Rivière-aux-Feuilles (TRF), occupent près d'un million de kilomètres carrés au nord du 53<sup>ème</sup> parallèle (Figure 1.1). Les femelles faisant preuve d'une forte philopatrie à leur site de naissance (Boulet et al. 2007), les deux troupeaux ont été nommés en fonction de leurs aires de mise bas respectives. Bien que les individus du TRG et du TRF ne diffèrent pas génétiquement (Boulet et al. 2007, Yannic et al. 2016), des différences ont pu être observées entre la démographie des deux troupeaux et dans la condition physique des individus (Couturier et al. 2004, Taillon et al. 2012a). Les données dendroécologiques suggèrent plusieurs phases de croissance et décroissance au cours des derniers siècles (Boudreau et al. 2003, Payette et al. 2004) et au cours des dernières décennies (Figure 1.2). Évalué à un minimum de 60 000 individus dans les années 1950 (Rasiulis 2015), l'effectif du TRG a rapidement augmenté. En 1976, il comptait 263 000



**Figure 1.1.** Aires annuelles des caribous des troupeaux Rivière-George (rouge) et Rivière-aux-Feuilles (vert) en 1993 (trait pointillé) et 2011 (trait plein). Les aires annuelles ont été déterminées à l'aide de polygones convexes minimums à 100% basés sur les localisations de femelles entre le 1<sup>er</sup> juin et le 31 mai de l'année suivante.

individus pour atteindre à 823 000 individus en 1993 ( $\pm 104\ 000$ , intervalle de confiance à 90% [IC90%]) avec un pic d'abondance vraisemblablement en 1989 (Couturier et al. 2004). La taille de population du TRG a ensuite chuté brusquement. En 2001, le troupeau avait diminué de plus de la moitié ( $385\ 000 \pm 108\ 000$  IC90%, Couturier et al. 2004) et le dernier recensement, en 2014, a permis d'estimer la harde à 14 200 individus ( $\pm 710$  IC90%, Ministère des Forêts, de la Faune et des Parcs du Québec [MFFP], *données non publiées*). Le TRF, quant à lui, fut estimé à 56 000 individus à sa découverte en 1975 (Le Hénaff 1976). La population a ensuite augmenté pour atteindre environ 628 000 individus en 2001 (Couturier et al. 2004). Tout comme le TRG, on estime que le TRF est actuellement stable ou en faible décroissance, le troupeau ayant été estimé à 430 000 individus ( $\pm 98\ 900$  IC90%) en 2011 (MFFP, *données non publiées*).



**Figure 1.2.** Variations des effectifs des troupeaux Rivière-George et Rivière-aux-Feuilles depuis 1950. Les estimés sont présentés avec leur intervalle de confiance à 90% lorsque ceux-ci sont disponibles.

Le TRG et le TRF montrent également une certaine variabilité dans leur répartition au sein de l'aire d'étude. Bien que les femelles du TRG et du TRF retournent chaque année sur leur aire de mise bas respective, un changement dans les localisations de celles-ci a pu être observé au cours du temps (Taillon et al. 2012b). Les variations les plus importantes dans la répartition des deux troupeaux s'observent cependant à l'hiver. Contrairement à l'aire de mise bas, les caribous du TRG et du TRF sont peu fidèles aux aires utilisées lors de l'hiver (Schaefer et al. 2000). Dans les années 1990, le TRG occupait à l'hiver une vaste région allant du Labrador à la Baie d'Hudson (Figure 1.1, Schmelzer & Otto 2003), ce déplacement vers l'ouest étant visiblement induit par une dégradation des aires d'hivernages proches de son aire de mise bas (Schmelzer & Otto 2003). Le TRG et le TRF pouvaient alors se trouver en contact lors du rut ou sur les aires d'hivernages, favorisant les échanges génétiques entre les deux troupeaux (Boulet et al. 2007). Cependant, depuis la fin des années 2000, la répartition annuelle du TRG se limite à la partie est de son aire de répartition historique (Figure 1.1), et plus aucun chevauchement entre les deux troupeaux n'est observé (Taillon et al. 2012b).

Bien qu'abondant à l'échelle mondiale, le caribou migrateur est pourtant une espèce sensible aux modifications de son habitat et les récents déclinés dramatiques observés dans plusieurs régions du monde démontrent son statut précaire (Vors & Boyce 2009). Par exemple, le TRG a perdu 96% de ses effectifs en à peine 15 ans (MFFP, *données non publiées*). Malgré les mesures de conservation prises dans le nord du Québec et au Labrador, les aires de protections mises en place sur les aires de mise bas ne permettent pas de tenir compte des variations dans la répartition des deux troupeaux au cours des années (Taillon et al. 2012b). Face aux changements climatiques et à une présence humaine de plus en plus intense dans les milieux nordiques (Festa-Bianchet et al. 2011), il est primordial d'identifier les facteurs affectant la migration, aussi bien temporellement (phénologie) que spatialement (patrons de migrations). La compréhension de l'impact des changements environnementaux sur les individus est essentielle afin de gérer les populations de caribous migrateurs au mieux, aussi bien dans une optique de conservation que d'exploitation.

## **Objectifs de la thèse**

L'objectif de cette thèse est de comprendre comment le climat, les ressources et la taille de population affectent les composantes spatiales et temporelles des migrations des caribous migrateurs de la Rivière-aux-Feuilles et de la Rivière-George. Elle comporte trois chapitres dont les objectifs spécifiques sont :

### **- Chapitre 2 : Identifier les dates de départ et d'arrivée des migrations.**

Afin de comprendre comment le climat et les variables environnementales affectent les composantes spatiales et temporelles de la migration, il est essentiel dans un premier temps d'identifier et de décrire les patrons de migration, c'est-à-dire les aires de départ et d'arrivée et les corridors empruntés, ainsi que les différents paramètres (phénologie, distance, durée, ...) de la migration (Wilcove & Wikelski 2008, Harris et al. 2009). Ce chapitre propose une méthodologie pour identifier les dates de départ et d'arriver en migration d'espèces ne possédant pas d'aires saisonnières fixes. Celle-ci repose sur l'hypothèse que la structure des déplacements (vitesse, sinuosité) varie au cours de l'année, selon que l'animal se trouve en migration ou qu'il utilise une aire saisonnière. Elle consiste, dans un premier temps à caractériser la structure des déplacements tout au long d'un trajet annuel à l'aide de la méthode du Temps de premier passage (Fauchald & Tveraa 2003) puis

à identifier les changements dans cette structure à l'aide d'un modèle statistique de segmentation (Lavielle 2005). J'ai tout d'abord testé l'efficacité de cette approche sur des trajets simulés présentant différentes pauses correspondant à l'utilisation d'aires saisonnières et de haltes migratoires, en faisant varier la durée des pauses ainsi que les paramètres de segmentation. J'ai ensuite appliqué la méthode à des trajets réels de femelles caribous du TRG et du TRF, et ce, afin d'identifier les dates de départ et d'arrivée de la migration printanière.

**- Chapitre 3 : Déterminer l'effet du climat et des ressources sur la phénologie des migrations printanières et automnales.**

Ce chapitre porte sur la dimension temporelle de la migration. Il vise à comprendre comment les variables climatiques locales et régionales, ainsi que l'abondance des ressources affectent les dates de départ et d'arrivée des migrations au printemps et à l'automne pour le TRG et le TRF. Pour ce faire, j'ai utilisé des données climatiques provenant du Modèle Climatique Régional Canadien ainsi que des données de couvert de neige et de glace. J'ai utilisé un indice climatique global, l'Oscillation Nord Atlantique (NAO), pour le climat régional et utilisé l'indice de végétation par différence normalisée (*Normalized Difference Vegetation Index*, NDVI) pour caractériser la productivité végétale. J'ai testé l'effet de ces différentes variables sur les dates de départ et d'arrivée des migrations de printemps et d'automne de 2001 à 2011 déterminées par la méthode présentée dans le chapitre 2. L'hypothèse principale de ce chapitre est que des conditions défavorables d'enneigement entraveront les déplacements lors des migrations au printemps et à l'automne, et que les caribous ajusteront leurs dates de départ, à l'aide d'indices environnementaux (températures, précipitations, équivalent en eau de la neige au sol), afin de migrer dans des conditions favorables. Je m'attends notamment à ce qu'une fonte des neiges précoce au printemps ou une neige abondante à l'automne retarde l'arrivée, respectivement, sur les aires de mise bas et d'hivernage.

**- Chapitre 4 : Déterminer l'effet du climat, des ressources et de la compétition sur les patrons de migration à l'automne.**



Ce chapitre porte sur la dimension spatiale de la migration. Il vise à identifier les facteurs parmi le climat local et régional, les ressources et la taille de population qui influencent la migration d'automne des caribous du TRG et du TRF et à comprendre comment ceux-ci affectent les probabilités d'observer des migrations vers quatre aires d'hivernages principales. J'ai utilisé les données climatiques du Modèle Climatique Régional Canadien, le NAO et l'indice de végétation par différence normalisée, ainsi que les estimés de population. J'ai dans un premier temps identifié les différentes aires d'hivernages utilisées par les caribous des deux troupes entre 1986 et 2012. J'ai ensuite utilisé une méthode de classification afin d'identifier les variables les plus influentes sur le choix de la destination des migrations d'automne et d'explorer la relation entre ces variables et la probabilité d'observer des migrations vers une aire donnée. Les hypothèses émises pour ce chapitre sont qu'une compétition accrue poussera les individus à migrer vers les aires d'hivernage les plus éloignées alors que des conditions défavorables de migration en limiteront l'accès.

## **CHAPITRE 2**

**Detecting changes in the annual movements of  
terrestrial migratory species: using the first-  
passage time to document the spring migration  
of caribou**

## Résumé

Les espèces migratrices font face à de nombreuses menaces en lien avec les activités humaines et les changements climatiques. Plusieurs populations migratrices sont en déclin et les individus perdent leur comportement migrateur. Afin de comprendre comment la perte d'habitat ou les changements dans la phénologie des processus naturels affectent les migrations, il est crucial d'identifier clairement la phénologie et les patrons de migration. Nous proposons une méthode objective, basée sur la détection des changements dans les patrons de déplacements, afin d'identifier les départs et les arrivées des migrations. Nous avons testé l'efficacité de notre approche à l'aide de trajets simulés avant de l'appliquer aux migrations printanières des caribous migrants des troupeaux Rivière-George et Rivière-aux-Feuilles dans le Nord-du-Québec et au Labrador. Nous avons appliqué l'analyse du temps de premier passage (*first-passage time*, FPT) aux localisations de 402 femelles récoltées entre 1986 et 2012 afin de caractériser leurs déplacements tout au long de l'année. Nous avons ensuite appliqué un modèle de segmentation aux profils obtenus pour les segmenter en portions présentant des valeurs homogènes de FPT, et ce, afin de discriminer les déplacements migratoires de l'utilisation des aires saisonnières. Ce processus de segmentation a été utilisé pour détecter la pause hivernale et l'utilisation de l'aire de mise bas, la migration printanière étant définie par le départ de l'aire d'hivernage et l'arrivée sur l'aire de mise bas. La segmentation des trajets simulés a réussi dans 96% des cas avec une haute précision (96.4% des localisations assignées correctement au segment correspondant). Parmi les 813 pauses hivernales et 669 utilisations de l'aire de mise bas pouvant potentiellement être détectées sur les profils de FPT si les individus réduisaient leurs déplacements pour chacune des deux périodes, nous avons détecté 100% des pauses hivernales attendues et 89% des utilisations de l'aire de mise bas. Nous avons, par ailleurs, identifié 648 migrations printanières complètes. Les échecs lors de la segmentation des pauses hivernales et à la mise bas étaient dus à des individus qui avaient seulement ralenti ou avaient effectué une pause moins prononcée, induisant un temps de passage moyen faible. Nos résultats montrent que notre approche, qui repose sur l'analyse des patrons de déplacement, est un outil adapté et facile à utiliser pour étudier les espèces présentant des variations dans leurs patrons de migration et dans l'utilisation de leurs aires saisonnières.

# Abstract

Migratory species face numerous threats related to human encroachment and climate change. Several migratory populations are declining and individuals are losing their migratory behaviour. To understand how habitat loss or changes in the phenology of natural processes affect migrations, it is crucial to clearly identify the timing and the patterns of migration. We propose an objective method, based on the detection of changes in movement patterns, to identify departure and arrival dates of the migration. We tested the efficiency of our approach using simulated paths before applying it to spring migration of migratory caribou from the Rivière-George and Rivière-aux-Feuilles herds in northern Québec and Labrador. We applied the First-Passage Time analysis (FPT) to locations of 402 females collected between 1986 and 2012 to characterize their movements throughout the year. We then applied a signal segmentation process in order to segment the path of FPT values into homogeneous bouts to discriminate migration from seasonal range use. This segmentation process was used to detect the winter break and the calving ground use because spring migration is defined by the departure from the winter range and the arrival on the calving ground. Segmentation of the simulated paths was successful in 96% of the cases, and had a high precision (96.4% of the locations assigned to the appropriate segment). Among the 813 winter breaks and 669 calving ground use expected to be detected on the FPT profiles, and assuming that individuals always reduced movements for each of the two periods, we detected 100% of the expected winter breaks and 89% of the expected calving ground use, and identified 648 complete spring migrations. Failures to segment winter breaks or calving ground use were related to individuals only slowing down or performing less pronounced pauses resulting in low mean FPT. We show that our approach, which relies only on the analysis of movement patterns, provides a suitable and easy-to-use tool to study species exhibiting variations in their migration patterns and seasonal range use.

## Introduction

Long-distance migration is one of the most impressive large-scale processes in ecology, which allows animals to follow seasonal changes in resource availability (Fryxell & Sinclair 1988, Bischof et al. 2012) and reduce predation risk (Hebblewhite & Merrill 2007, McKinnon et al. 2010). Several components of the migration can be assessed such as distance traveled by individuals, duration and timing of the migration, as well as the location of migration corridors and seasonal ranges (*e.g.* Sawyer et al. 2009, Bunnefeld et al. 2011, Stanley et al. 2012, Takii et al. 2012). The timing of the migration is particularly crucial in the actual context of climate change, especially at high latitudes where changes are generally more drastic (Robinson et al. 2009). Indeed, climate change is likely to influence plant phenology (Parmesan & Yohe 2003), possibly leading to a mismatch between the timing of arrival on breeding areas and the peak in resource productivity necessary for the increased energy demand of lactation (Post & Forchhammer 2008, Both et al. 2010). It is thus essential to develop standardized methods to determine the timing of migrations to assess how climate change is affecting migratory species.

The timing of migration can be assessed using the date when individuals reach particular landmarks during migration, such as certain meridians or parallels (Stanley et al. 2012), or from the departure and arrival dates into seasonal ranges (Mahoney & Schaefer 2002a). When seasonal ranges are well defined spatially, departure and arrival dates can easily be assessed using geographical boundaries (Mahoney & Schaefer 2002a, Mitchell et al. 2012). Seasonal ranges, however, may vary over time. Changes in winter range locations have been observed in several migratory ungulates (*e.g.* moose, *Alces alces*, Sawyer et al. 2009, sika deer, *Cervus nippon*, Takii et al. 2012) and changes in calving ground locations may also occur (migratory caribou, *Rangifer tarandus*, Taillon et al. 2012b). For migratory caribou from northern Quebec and Labrador, individuals display low fidelity to their winter home range (Schaefer et al. 2000), and the location of the winter range has drastically changed over the last few decades (Schmelzer & Otto 2003, Couturier et al. 2009b). Similar changes for the size and location of calving ground have also been reported (Gunn et al. 2008, Taillon et al. 2012b). Because seasonal ranges vary geographically, the use of static landmarks is often inappropriate to assess the timing of migration. In such cases, an

alternative is to investigate changes in the structure (*e.g.* speed, direction) of the movements (Singh et al. 2012).

During the last few decades, the technology available to follow individuals remotely has greatly improved, providing useful tools to describe animal movements. At the same time, new methods have been developed to analyze telemetry data (Schick et al. 2008) allowing for the detection of changes in the scale or pattern of movements, and linking these changes to individual characteristics or habitat heterogeneity (Fauchald & Tveraa 2003, Frair et al. 2005). One such method is the First-Passage Time (FPT, Fauchald & Tveraa 2003), which estimates the search effort of an animal along a path and discriminates between traveling and foraging activities (Pinaud & Weimerskirch 2007). The FPT relies on the assumption that, within a patchy environment, a consumer should concentrate its search effort in areas of interest, expressing an area-restricted search behaviour, *i.e.* slowing down and increasing its turning rate inside resource-rich patches (Kareiva & Odell 1987). FPT allows for the assessment of the spatial scale at which individuals select their habitat and the identification of areas where they concentrate their search effort (Fauchald & Tveraa 2003, Pinaud & Weimerskirch 2007). At large scales, FPT can be useful to identify seasonal ranges (restricted search area) and migration routes (long-distance movements). The shift between high FPT occurring in residency areas and low FPT observed during migration can then be used to identify the departure and arrival dates of long-distance migrations (Bailleul et al. 2012). Shifts in the FPT time series can be assessed visually, but Barraquand & Benhamou (2008), following Lavielle (2005), proposed an objective method to identify the breakpoints in the time series by combining an approach similar to FPT with a signal segmentation process.

Here we modified the approach suggested by Barraquand & Benhamou (2008) by applying the signal segmentation process to FPT profiles, and propose an objective method to assess the timing of migration. Using only changes in movement patterns without the need to take into account any landmark or past seasonal ranges to define timing and patterns of migration, our approach could be useful to study the migration of species showing high variations in their migration patterns and seasonal range use (*e.g.* Boone et al.

2006, Singh & Milner-Gulland 2011). We tested the effectiveness of our approach using simulated paths with two seasonal ranges and two migrations interrupted by a stopover, to which we applied the FPT analysis and segmentation process. Then we applied the same approach to telemetry data to investigate the spring migration of migratory caribou from the Rivière-George (RGH) and the Rivière-aux-Feuilles (RFH) herds in northern Québec and Labrador. These caribou undertake a long-distance spring migration from their winter range to their calving ground with a large increase in movement rates during migration (Gunn et al. 2008, Couturier et al. 2010). Our main goal was to identify dates corresponding to the departure from the winter range and the arrival on the calving ground. We first characterized the pattern of movements with the FPT method, and then used the signal segmentation process to detect segments corresponding to the winter break and the calving ground use for each individual.

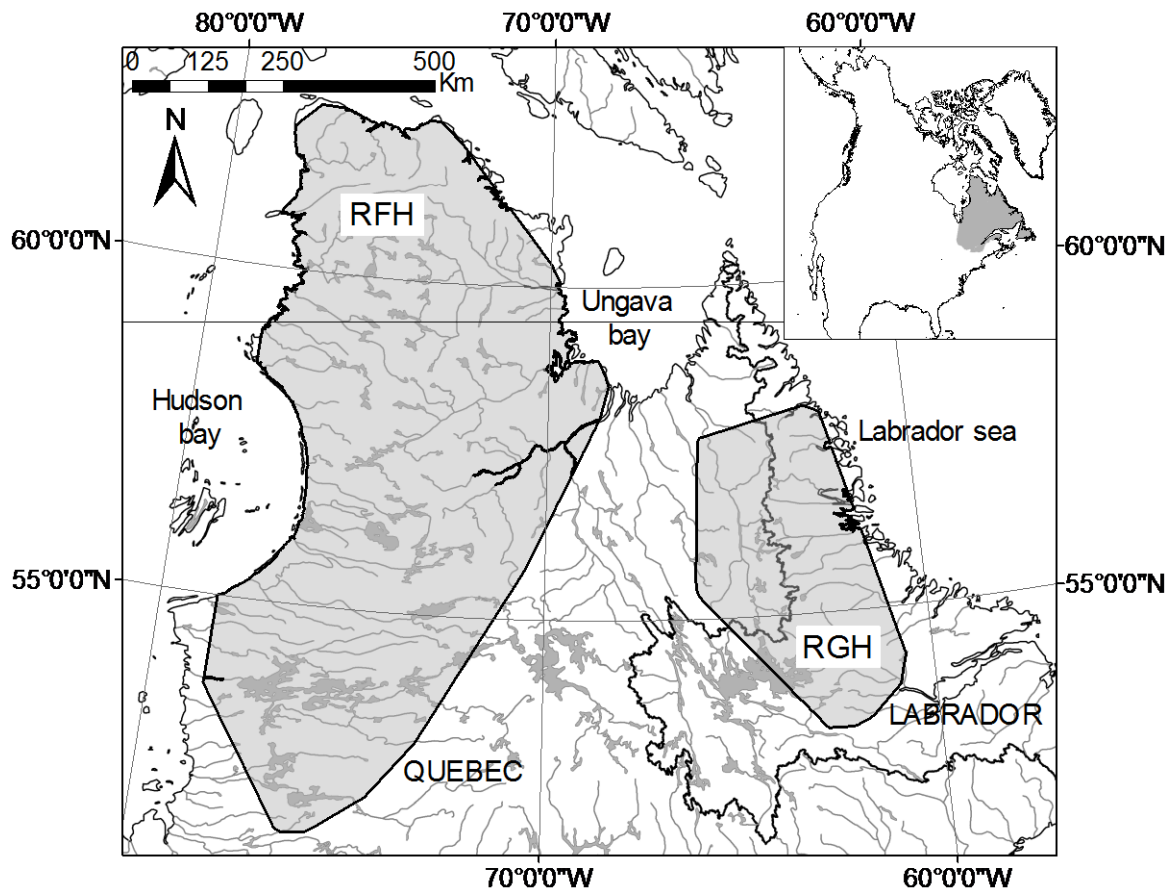
## **Materials and Methods**

### *Caribou herds*

The RGH and RFH range over 1 000 000 km<sup>2</sup> in northern Québec and Labrador (Figure 2.1). Although the wintering areas of the two herds may overlap in certain years, the calving grounds are located about 800 km apart (57°N, 65°W for RGH; 58°N, 73°W for RFH). Females are highly philopatric to their calving ground (Boulet et al. 2007). They leave their winter range in the boreal forest usually in April and migrate toward their respective calving ground in the tundra. Females usually arrive on the calving grounds in late May then move toward their summer range, also located in the tundra, in early July (Taillon et al. 2012b). They migrate back to their wintering areas in October-December.

During the last few decades, the two herds have shown large variations in population size. RGH numbered at least 60 000 individuals in the 1950's (Rasiulis 2015), increased up to 823 000 individuals in 1993, and then dramatically decreased to 385 000 caribou in 2001 (Couturier et al. 2004) and 27 600 caribou in 2012 (Ministère des Forêts, de la Faune et des Parcs du Québec [MFFP], *unpublished data*). RFH was discovered in 1975 when its size was estimated at 56 000 individuals (Le Hénaff 1976). The herd reached

628 000 caribou in 2001 (Couturier et al. 2004) and declined to 430 000 individuals in 2011 (MFFP, unpublished data).



**Figure 2.1.** Annual ranges of the Rivière-George (RGH) and the Rivière-aux-Feuilles (RFH) migratory caribou herds. RGH and RFH are located in Northern Québec and Labrador. Annual ranges are 100% Minimum Convex Polygons based on ARGOS locations of females in 2010.

#### *Tracking data*

We used the locations of 252 females for RGH equipped with ARGOS satellite-tracking collars (Telonics, ARGOS platform, Mesa, Arizona, USA) between 1986 and 2012, and locations of 150 females for RFH collared between 1991 and 2012. We captured females mostly on their calving ground using a net-gun fired from a helicopter (Bookhout 1996) following the guidelines from the Canadian Council on Animal Care. We considered individuals to be independent because capture sites within a given year were spread over several thousands km<sup>2</sup>. On average, we followed 44 females (SE ± 5) each year and



females were monitored on average for 2.0 years ( $SE \pm 0.1$ ) with some individuals followed for up to 10 years. Locations were usually collected every 5 days (65.7% of the database) but frequency ranged from one location every day (1.3%) up to one per 7 days (0.9%). We filtered the data using a similar algorithm as Austin et al. (2003) to eliminate aberrant locations: we selected the most accurate location for a given transmission period based on signal quality and we excluded locations leading to movements higher than 50 kilometers per day (Boulet et al. 2007).

### *The First-Passage Time analysis*

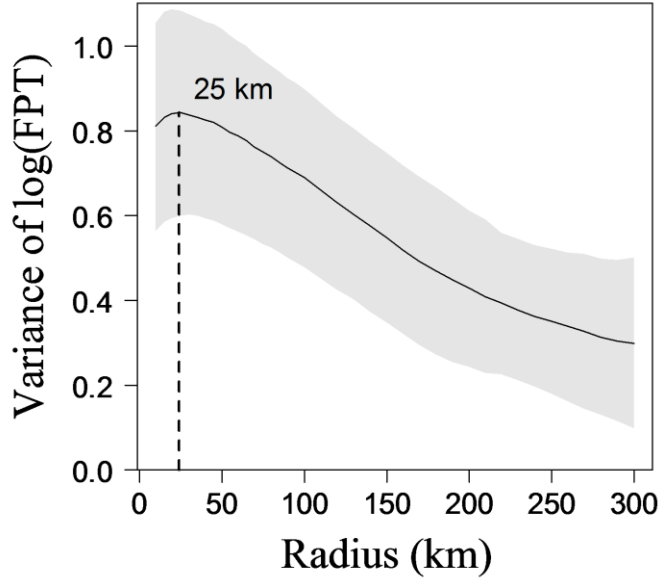
The first step of the process was to characterize caribou movements throughout the year. For this, despite we followed Barraquand & Benhamou (2008) for the segmentation process, we used the FPT analysis (Fauchald & Tveraa 2003) rather than their method of residence time, derived from FPT. Both methods require setting the size of a circle used in the analysis. This circle size can be set according the ecological knowledge of the species (Barraquand & Benhamou 2008) but when this knowledge is lacking, such as in our study, Fauchald & Tveraa (2003) provide the methodology to assess empirically the circle size to use for the FTP analysis directly from the data set. Analysis was performed using the software R (version 3.0.0, R Core Team 2013). The FPT corresponds to the time needed by an individual to cross for the first time a circle of a given radius, the individual passing by the centre of the circle. FPT values summarize both the velocity and the tortuosity of the movement along the path (Fauchald & Tveraa 2003). We associated low FPT values to long-distance movements such as migration and high FPT values to the use of seasonal ranges. To perform the FPT analysis and also the following segmentation process, we assumed that caribou moved linearly with a constant speed between two locations and completed inter-location paths by adding one point every 12 hours (Fauchald & Tveraa 2003, Pinaud & Weimerskirch 2007).

Before applying the FPT to the whole data set, we first defined the radius of the circle used to calculate FPT values. From all the locations of a given female caribou, we selected complete annual paths from 1 August of a given year to 31 July of the following year between 1986 and 2010 (401 paths). We calculated FPT along each path with a given

radius  $r$  centered on animal locations or interpolated points between them. We investigated  $r$ -values ranging from 10 to 300 km (radius increment: 10 to 100 km, every 5 km; 100 to 300 km, every 10 km). The radius  $r_{max}$  occurs at the peak of variance in FPT and corresponds to the spatial scale at which an individual perceives its environment (Fauchald & Tveraa 2003). We thus calculated the variance in FPT,  $S(r)$ , for each radius and each path as  $\text{Var}[\log(\text{fpt}(r))]$ , and calculated the mean  $S(r)$  for each radius. We then plotted mean  $S(r)$  against radius, and observed a peak in the variance for  $r_{max} = 25$  km (Figure 2.2). We used this radius,  $r_{max}$ , as a common scale to calculate FPT along the complete path of each individual (Freitas et al. 2008). We then obtained a profile of FPT for each female by plotting their FPT values against the time of the year (Figure 2.3).

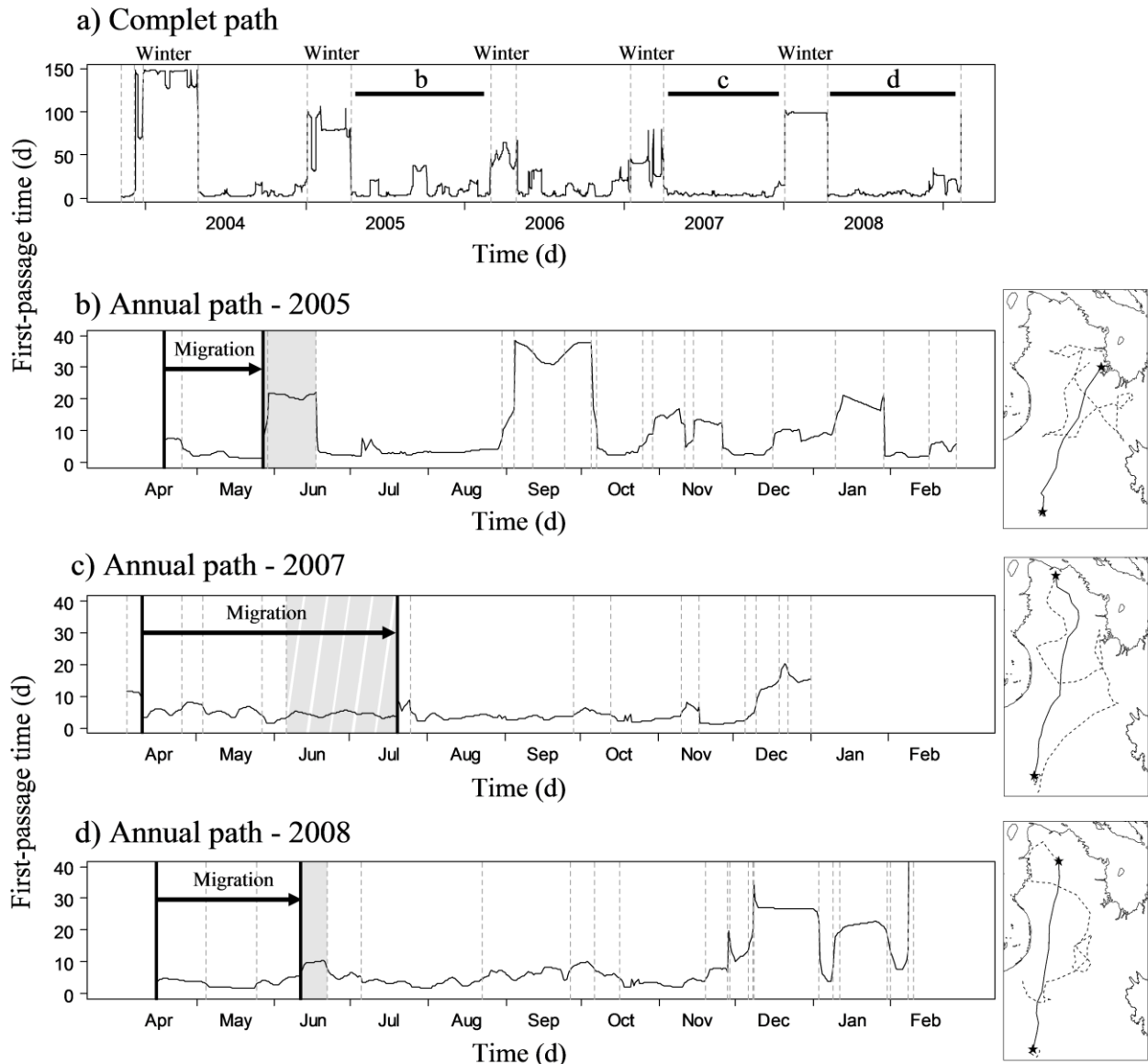
### *Segmentation process*

In the second step, we subdivided the paths in bouts of similar FPT values. Following Barraquand & Benhamou (2008), we segmented FPT profiles using the Lavielle's model selection procedure (Lavielle 2005). This method allows for the detection of changes in a signal by locating the breakpoints in the signal without prior knowledge on the initial number of breakpoints. Thus, the signal is segmented in bouts of homogeneous mean or variance. Lavielle's method consists in minimizing a penalized contrast function  $J(\tau, y) + \beta \text{pen}(\tau)$ , where  $J(\tau, y)$  is the contrast function that measures the fit of  $\tau$ , any segmentation of the signal, with  $y$ , the data set, for a given number of segments  $K$ . The penalty term,  $\text{pen}(\tau)$ , is used to assess the number of breakpoints, and  $\beta$  is a penalization parameter that weights the penalty term (for details see Lavielle 2005). First, the method assesses the best segmentation of the signal for any fixed  $K$  segments, then the most likely segment number  $K^*$  is selected. To assess  $K^*$ , Lavielle (2005) proposed to use the second derivative of the contrast function by selecting the greatest value of  $K$  for which the second derivative of the contrast function is greater than a given threshold  $S$  that we set at  $S = 0.75$  following Lavielle (2005) and others (e.g. Picard et al. 2007, Barraquand & Benhamou 2008). The analysis can easily be performed using Lavielle's program in Matlab, available at <http://www.math.u-psud.fr/~lavielle/programs/>.



**Figure 2.2.** Mean variance of the log-transformed First-Passage Time (FPT) as a function of the radius  $r$ . Mean variance in  $\log(\text{FPT})$  is presented with  $\pm$  SE (grey shade) and  $r$  is in kilometres (km). Mean variance in  $\log(\text{FPT})$  was calculated from 401 complete annual paths of migratory caribou spanning from 1 August to 31 July. The peak in variance was observed at  $r_{max} = 25$  km.

Lavielle's method has a wider range of applications than methods based on AIC or on BIC that require Gaussian and independent data (Lavielle 2005), and it can be applied to correlated data such as animal locations (Barraquand & Benhamou 2008). The approach is more heuristic and requires the user to make decisions regarding three parameters: the variable on which to perform segmentation (mean, variance or both), the minimal length of the segments ( $l.min$ ) and the maximum number of segment to be inferred ( $Kmax$ ). As suggested by Barraquand & Benhamou (2008), preliminary examination of the FPT profiles indicated that the most important variations in our system were for mean FPT values. We therefore segmented the caribou FPT profiles according to the mean of FPT values. We set  $l.min$  at 1 in order to allow the procedure to detect any segment regardless of its duration. We set  $Kmax$  at 30, because Lavielle (2005) suggested using a value higher than expected, *i.e.* for our study 5 segments corresponding to winter range use, spring migration, calving ground use, summer range use and fall migration. For all identified breakpoints that corresponded to inter-location points, we referred to the closest "real" location to establish the beginning and ending dates of each period.



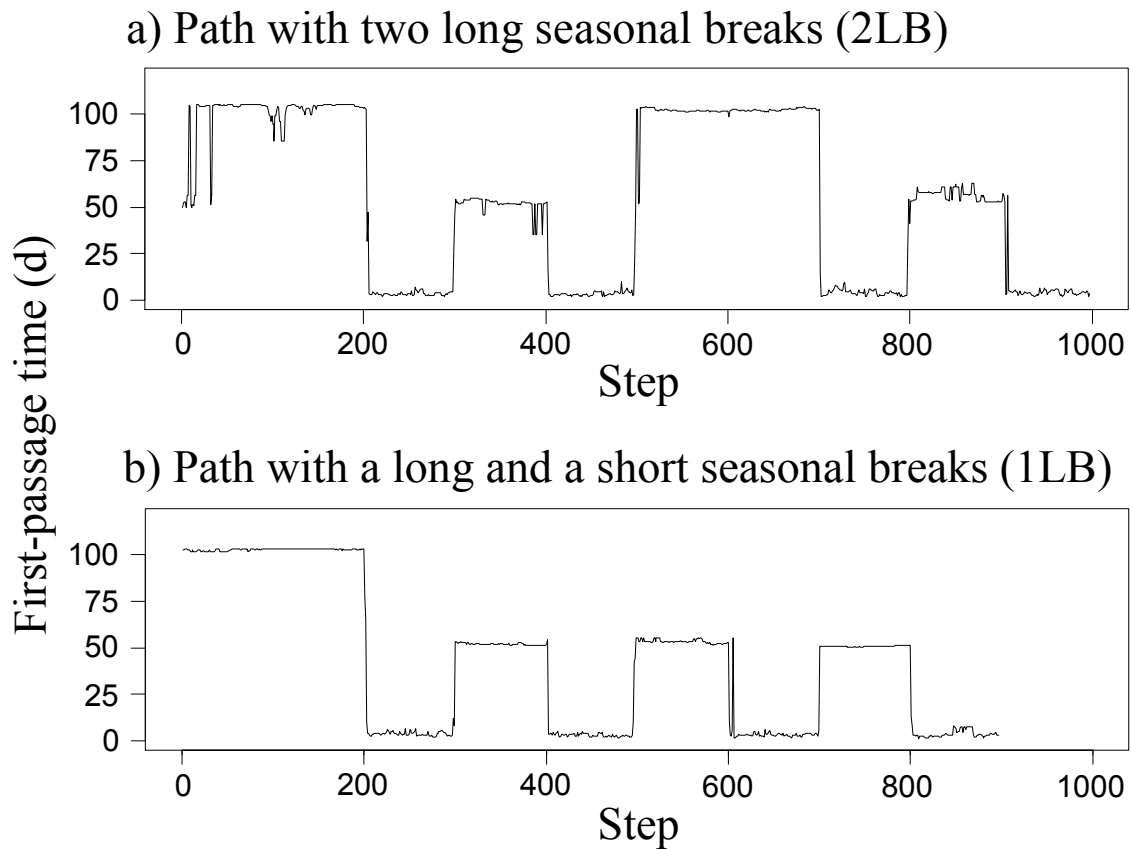
**Figure 2.3.** Example of the segmentation process of a First-Passage Time (FPT) profile. FPT profile from a female migratory caribou followed from winter 2004 to winter 2009. FPT is presented against time in days (d). Dashed vertical bars represent breakpoints. a) First run of the segmentation: winter breaks are identified and correspond to the segments with high FPT. The segments between two winter breaks were extracted. Horizontal bars topped by a letter indicate the segments used in b), c) and d) to illustrate the fine scale segmentation. b) Second run of the segmentation on the 2005's path: solid vertical bars correspond to the beginning and the end of the spring migration. The migration started directly from the winter break and stopped with the beginning of the calving ground use detected in June (grey shade). The corresponding inter-winter path is represented on the map. The black line corresponds to the migration with the departure and arrival dates (black stars), and the dashed line corresponds to the rest of the inter-winter path. c) No calving (2007): a break is present at the beginning of the inter-winter profile, the migration starts at the end of this break. Despite a segment present in June (striped grey shade), no break was detected and the end of the migration was assessed by observing a change in path

orientation. d) Uncertain calving ground use (2008): despite a short break was detected in June (grey shade), FPT value remained low. A visual control on the path was performed to confirm that a break occurred within the historical calving ground.

### *Simulations*

We assessed the effectiveness of Lavielle's method to detect changes in a FPT profile using simulated paths composed of 8 segments with two seasonal ranges and two migrations, each migration containing a stopover (Figure 2.4). We simulated two types of paths. In the first one, referred to as 2LB thereafter, the two seasonal ranges corresponded to two long breaks (LB) and the stopovers corresponded to two short breaks (SB, Figure 2.4a). In the second one, referred to as 1LB thereafter, the first seasonal range corresponded to a LB and the second seasonal range to a SB (Figure 2.4b). This second type of path is similar to caribou paths which are composed of a main break during winter and a shorter break at calving, similar to the other breaks occurring during the year (*e.g.* Figure 2.3b). We simulated each type of path 50 times.

We built simulated paths assuming extensive movements during migration segments and area-restricted search behaviour during break segments (seasonal ranges and stopovers). We used 100 locations for the migration segments, 100 locations for SB and 200 locations for LB. Location frequency was 12 h. Based on real caribou datasets, we drew a speed value for each step from a log-normal distribution with a mean of 15 km/day and 3 km/day, respectively for migration and break segments, and with a coefficient of variation of 1 for both. We drew turning angles from a wrapped Cauchy circular distribution with a mean of 0 and a concentration parameter of 0.8 and 0.1, respectively for migration and break segments. For breaks segments, we used patches with diameters of 25 km and 50 km, respectively for SB and LB. In both cases, simulated individuals were forced to stop when crossing the edge of the patch and their next step was directed toward the centre of the patch. The edge of the patch acted as a reflecting boundary until the migration started.



**Figure 2.4.** First-Passage Time (FPT) profiles of simulated paths. FPT is presented in relation to step number. Simulated paths are composed of 8 segments: two seasonal ranges and two migrations, each migration containing a stopover. a) The "2LB" paths have two long breaks corresponding to the two seasonal ranges. b) The "1LB" paths have one long break for the first seasonal range and one short break for the second seasonal range, similar to the stopovers.

We applied the FPT analysis with a circle radius of 25 km and then segmented the FPT profiles (see Annexe 1, Figure A2.1 for a comparative figure of a simulated path and a path from Argos locations). The segmentation was performed on the mean of the FPT values and we set  $K_{max}$  at 30. For the  $l.min$  parameter we tested the segmentation without constraint ( $l.min = 1$ ) and with  $l.min = 10$ , corresponding to the diameter of the circle/mean step length (Barraquand & Benhamou 2008). Strong *a priori* knowledge on the ecology of a species could encourage people to use the expected number of segments rather than the optimal number provided by Lavielle's method. We compared the segmentation obtained with  $l.min = 1$ , using the optimal number of segments and using 4 segments expected for two seasonal ranges and two migration movements. We considered that the segmentation

failed when a segment in the FPT profile included both a migration and a break segment. We did not consider over-segmentation as a failure if the over-segmented portion of the profile corresponded to one migration or break segment. We estimated the precision of the segmentation for the paths for which the segmentation succeeded by calculating the proportion of locations assigned to the appropriate segments.

#### *Detection of winter breaks and calving ground use*

We used the segmentation process to identify winter breaks and calving ground use. Assuming that individuals always greatly reduce their movement rate during the winter and calving periods (Gunn et al. 2008, Couturier et al. 2010), we expected to detect a total of 773 winter breaks and 669 calving ground uses over our study period for all years and both herds, because we followed several individuals for more than one year. Preliminary exploration of the FPT profiles revealed that FPT values during winter were higher than for other annual periods (see Results). To avoid any bias in the segmentation process due to the contrast in FPT values between winter and other annual periods, we performed a first segmentation on the complete path of each individual, allowing the detection of the winter break. We then extracted portions of the path included between two consecutive winter breaks (referred as "inter-winter path" thereafter) and we ran a second analysis to segment the inter-winter path at a finer scale to detect calving ground use.

When we did not detect a winter break during the first segmentation, we subdivided the whole path in yearly paths centered on the winter breaks (from 1 August to the following 31 July) and performed the segmentation process again on a yearly basis. For the calving ground use, when an individual appeared to arrive late on the calving ground, *i.e.* a late break observed on the FTP profile at the end or after the usual calving period, or when the break corresponding to the calving ground use did not appear clearly on the FPT profile (Figure 2.3d), we used a geographic information system (ArcGIS v9.3) to determine if the break occurred within the historical calving ground.

### *Statistical analysis*

To investigate further why breaks were not detected for some paths, we compared the breaks successfully detected, *i.e.* segments with a high FPT value corresponding to the winter break or calving ground use directly identifiable on the FPT profiles, with those where the segmentation failed during the first run. For the winter breaks, failed breaks corresponded to breaks identified by running the segmentation process a second time on a yearly subset of the whole path. For the calving ground use, we used paths that presented a slight increase in FPT in June but that was not detected automatically. We delineated the "failed" break visually using the beginning of the increase and the end of the decrease in FPT value. We compared the duration of the break (in days) and the mean FPT value of the break (in days) between the successfully detected breaks and the one the detection failed using linear mixed models ("*glmer*" function in the "*lme4*" package, Bates et al. 2014) with female identity as a random factor and the detection status (yes/no) as an explanatory variable. Detection status variable was centred. We used a Gaussian error with a log-link function for the mean FPT of the winter break and for the duration and the mean FPT of the calving ground use to meet the normality of the residuals and homogeneity of variance assumptions. The frequency of locations did not affect the results (*unpublished data*). All results are presented as mean  $\pm$  SE.

## **Results**

### *Simulations*

Segmentation of the simulated paths succeeded for most of the paths when the optimal number of segments was used (Table 2.1). When the segmentation was constrained at 4 segments, it failed for 12% of the paths for 2LB and only succeeded for one path for 1LB (Table 2.1). Over-segmentation occurred only on LB segments but never led to the failure of the segmentation. Precision between  $l.min = 1$  and  $l.min = 10$  was the same when we excluded the paths for which detection failed for 2LB, and was not significantly different for 1LB ( $t = -1,0$ ,  $df = 49$ ,  $P = 0.32$ ). Precision was higher for the unconstrained segmentation than for the segmentation constrained at 4 segments ( $t = 2.8$ ,  $df = 41$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ).



**Table 2.1.** Success and precision of the segmentation process for simulated migratory caribou paths.

Path type and parameters used for segmentation	% of paths successfully segmented ( $n = 50$ )	Number of segments $\pm$ SD	Precision $\pm$ SD
2LB simulations			
min. segment length = 1	96	$8.2 \pm 0.9$	$96.4\% \pm 2.2$
min. segment length = 10	98	$8.2 \pm 0.8$	$96.4\% \pm 2.2$
number of segments = 4	88	$4 \pm 0.0$	$95.3\% \pm 2.6$
1LB simulations			
min. segment length = 1	100	$8.5 \pm 0.6$	$97.7\% \pm 1.5$
min. segment length = 10	100	$8.5 \pm 0.6$	$97.9\% \pm 1.1$
number of segments = 4	2	$4 \pm 0.0$	NA

2LB simulations correspond to simulated paths with two long breaks (use of seasonal ranges) and two short breaks (stopovers). 1LB simulations correspond to paths with a long break for the first seasonal range and short breaks for the second seasonal range and the stopovers. The precision corresponds to the proportion of locations assigned to the appropriate segments for each path.

#### *Winter break detection*

The first coarse segmentation allowed us to highlight path segments corresponding to the winter breaks (Figure 2.3a). We identified 679 winter breaks among 773 potential winter breaks during the first phase of the segmentation analysis. From these breaks, 538 included clear starting and ending locations, and could be considered as complete. For 141 breaks either the beginning or the ending portion of the path was missing, making the break period incomplete. The 94 remaining winter breaks (77 complete, 17 incomplete) were all detected by segmenting the yearly paths. Winter breaks were more difficult to detect in years when animals kept moving at medium movement rates, performing less marked winter breaks. Indeed, breaks that we could not detect in the first run of the segmentation were shorter (detection succeeded:  $109 \pm 1$  days, detection failed:  $77 \pm 5$  days; Annexe 2, Table A2.1; Annexe 3, Figure A2.2a) and had lower FPT values (detection succeeded:  $54 \pm 1$  days, detection failed:  $21 \pm 1$  days; Annexe 2, Table A2.1; Annexe 3, Figure A2.2a) compared to detected breaks.

#### *Departure and arrival dates of the spring migration*

We considered the departure from the winter area as the beginning of the spring migration, *i.e.* the breakpoint corresponding to the end of the winter break, and the arrival on the calving ground, *i.e.* the breakpoint corresponding to the beginning of calving ground

use, as the end of the migration. Migratory movements mostly start directly from the winter break (Figure 2.3b and 2.3d), but in some years short pre-migration movements could occur. In these cases, we observed a segment with higher FPT value than for the migration segment at the beginning of the inter-winter path and we considered the migration started at the end of this break (Figure 2.3c). For the arrival date, we identified the break occurring in June that we assumed to correspond to arrival on the calving ground.

We directly identified calving ground use and late breaks on FPT profiles in 593 cases (584 complete, 9 incomplete) among 669 potential breaks corresponding to calving ground use. We did not detect any break for 5 inter-winter paths (0.7% of all inter-winter paths) where caribou did not perform a spring migration and for 10 inter-winter paths (1.5%) for which females did not significantly reduce movement rate (Figure 2.3c). However in 8 cases, females reversed their movements at the end of the migration. For the 61 remaining potential breaks (9%), detection failed and additional visual examination was required. Similar to winter breaks, the duration of these breaks was shorter ( $P < 0.001$ ; detection succeeded:  $28.3 \pm 0.5$  days, detection failed:  $20.0 \pm 2$  days; Annexe 2, Table A2.1; Annexe 3, Figure A2.2b) and the mean FPT lower ( $P < 0.001$ ; detection succeeded:  $20.5 \pm 0.3$  days, detection failed:  $13 \pm 1$  days; Annexe 2, Table A2.1; Annexe 3, Figure A2.2b) than for the breaks directly identified on the FPT profiles.

Overall, we identified 672 spring migration departure dates from the 773 winter breaks detected (RGH: 369, RFH: 303). The end of the break was missing in 13% of the cases, and the arrival dates were identified for all of the 593 calving ground use detected (RGH: 330, RFH: 263). We identified both departure and arrival dates for 89% of the 625 complete spring migrations present in our database (RGH: 305, RFH: 249).

## **Discussion**

Migratory species are currently of central interest (*e.g.* Bolger et al. 2008, Robinson et al. 2009), and it is thus essential to develop standardized methods to characterize migration patterns. Our approach adapted from Barraquand & Benhamou (2008), based on changes in movement patterns, allows for the objective segmentation of animal paths into

homogeneous bouts in order to determine the timing of the spring migration at the individual level. By detecting winter breaks and calving ground use along migratory caribou paths, we were able to identify the departure and arrival dates of the migration for most individuals.

Segmentation of the simulated paths was highly efficient without constraining the number of segments. We did not notice any difference in precision when setting a minimum segment length, however using a minimum segment length could limit over-segmentation such as observed in Figure 2.3b. When we used a priori knowledge of two seasonal ranges and two migrations to fix the segmentation, results were less conclusive. The success and precision of the segmentation were acceptable for 2LB as the seasonal breaks corresponded to the main breaks. However, we missed the information about stopovers. The complete failure of the segmentation for 1LB when the number of segments was set at 4, was obviously due to the fact that the second seasonal break did not differ from stopovers. We found that using *a priori* knowledge can lead to a wrong segmentation if unexpected breaks occur in the FPT profile. *A priori* knowledge of the ecology of the species should be used to interpret the segmentation. Knowing when animals are supposed to stop or to move allows identifying which segments correspond to seasonal range use and migration, and unexpected breaks or fast movements could highlight unknown behaviour or revealed disruptions of the migration or perturbations on the seasonal range.

Segmentation of the caribou FPT profiles yielded results consistent with the literature on spring migration, as well as the use of winter range and calving ground (Gunn et al. 2008, Couturier et al. 2010). Individual movement rates are known to decrease below 5 km per day during two periods of the year, first on winter ranges where they are the lowest observed throughout the year (Couturier et al. 2010) and second, for a short period after calving (Gunn et al. 2008). The segmentation process highlighted path segments with very high FPT values in winter and shorter pauses in June. We detected 100% of the expected winter breaks, including the breaks detected within the yearly subsets when the whole paths segmentation failed, and 89% of the expected calving ground use. Most failures at detecting winter breaks were related to individuals performing short stops with a

low mean FPT. For calving ground use, failure seemed to correspond to individuals that only slowed down without stopping. Because the FPT value is lower for calving ground use than for winter breaks we used a two-step segmentation approach. The contrast between winter breaks and the other annual periods was too high to allow the segmentation to correctly detect winter breaks and calving ground use on the same FPT profile. For species showing similar space use throughout the year, with consequently similar FPT values on winter and summer ranges, a single segmentation process of the FPT profile could be sufficient. However, if space-use patterns of the seasonal ranges vary greatly, we suggest performing first a large-scale segmentation to identify and exclude the main breaks before applying the segmentation to the rest of the year.

FPT analysis has mainly been used to study foraging behaviour in marine mammals and sea birds (Bailey & Thompson 2006, Pinaud & Weimerskirch 2007) and, to a lesser extent, terrestrial mammals (Frair et al. 2005, Le Corre et al. 2008). However, the FPT was recently used in the study of long-distance movements such as migration (Bailleul et al. 2012). In these studies, circle size to calculate the FPT was generally assessed for each individual but a common scale can also be used for all individuals (Fauchald & Tveraa 2006, Freitas et al. 2008). We used the same circle size, based on the peak in mean variance of FPT for all individuals (Fauchald & Tveraa 2006), to facilitate the comparison between individuals. The circle size used was half the size of the mean winter range (major axis of winter home ranges:  $100 \pm 3$  km) but it was similar to the size of the calving ground (major axis of calving ground:  $55 \pm 1$  km). The use of an overly large radius could favour the incorporation of high-speed movement steps, resulting in smoothing the increase in FPT and leading to an overestimation of the duration of the breaks. However, step length during migration was, on average, higher than the diameter of the circle we used (spring migration step length:  $65 \pm 37$  km), so a circle centred on the first location of the calving ground was unlikely to include the entire migration step.

The segmentation process failed for some inter-winter paths. Failures, however, can have a biological meaning. We assumed that females end their spring migration with calving but pregnancy rates reported in these two herds in the past few decades have been

lower than our detection success of the calving ground use (<80%, Couturier et al. 2009a). Thus, failures could correspond to non-gravid females that have not stopped to calve but only slow down with the herd. Failures can also highlight individuals that do not adopt a "classical" migratory behaviour and the study of these individuals could reveal alternative tactics of long-distance movements. In studies including males and females, differences in timing and distance travelled have been reported between sexes (Cristol et al. 1999, Sawyer et al. 2009) and in ecosystems with poorly predictable resources, such as rainfall-driven ecosystems, migratory individuals can adopt long-distance movements relying mostly on nomadism instead of strict migratory movements depending on predictable changes in resource availability (Holdo et al. 2009). Variations in the segmentation of the FPT profile between individuals or between years could also reveal changes in migratory behaviour.

Our approach worked well for the spring migration as it is clearly defined by the winter break and the calving ground use. The fall migration could be more difficult to define because caribou range over larger areas than in spring (*e.g.* Couturier et al. 2004, McNeil et al. 2005), the fall migration spans over a longer time period than spring migration and it may be separated into several bouts (Couturier et al. 2004, McNeil et al. 2005). To extend our approach to the fall migration, the first step should be to identify recurrent changes in movement patterns among individuals and years. For example, in several herds movement rates are very high in summer and drastically decline at the end of the summer before caribou begin their fall migration (Fancy et al. 1989, Poole et al. 2013). This movement pattern results in a break at the end of the summer (see Figure 2.3b). Thus, based on movement patterns our approach is appropriate to study labile migrations with unfixed departure and arrival areas. Yearly variations in the location of seasonal home ranges are observed in several migratory ungulates (Bekenov et al. 1998, Sawyer et al. 2009, Morrison & Bolger 2012), notably in highly mobile species tracking changes in resources during migration and throughout a broad seasonal range (Boone et al. 2006, Singh & Milner-Gulland 2011). Because it does not rely on the determination of the seasonal range location to assess timing of movements, our approach could also possibly be applied to seasonal movements of nomadic species, that are far less understood than

migrant species and for which seasonal ranges do not show regular temporal and spatial patterns (Mueller & Fagan 2008, Olson et al. 2010).

## **Conclusion**

Here, we proposed an objective and easy-to-use approach to identify the migratory movements of individuals. We could easily determine the main characteristics of migration (timing, duration, spatial patterns) using the segmentation technique, making our approach suitable to analyse migration patterns. Moreover, studying changes in FPT values during migration could also provide information on stopover sites, a key component for the migration of numerous species (Åkesson & Hedenström 2007, Sawyer & Kauffman 2011), or potential migration disruptions due, for example, to human disturbances (Berger 2004). An in-depth understanding of migration is crucial to estimate the impact of the threats migratory species are facing, as several populations have already declined (Bolger et al. 2008, Harris et al. 2009) or have lost their migratory behaviour (Wilcove & Wikelski 2008). The approach we developed is a helpful tool in the challenging process of acquiring the in-depth understanding of migration patterns necessary to succeed in the conservation of migratory species.

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Lambert, M. Le Corre, P. May, Y. Michaud, M. Pachkowski, Y. Pépin, R. Perron, A. Thiffault, A.-A. Tremblay, and especially V. Brodeur and S. Rivard for help with data gathering. We finally thank C. Hins for logistic support and advice.

## **CHAPITRE 3**

**Climate change and variations in the timing of  
the spring and fall migrations of a long-  
distance migrant ungulate**



# Résumé

Les espèces migratrices à longue distance doivent faire face à des changements dans la phénologie des processus naturels en lien avec les changements climatiques. Un décalage entre l'émergence des ressources et l'arrivée sur les aires d'élevage ou des changements dans les conditions rencontrées lors de la migration, tels qu'une fonte précoce des neiges dans les environnements nordiques, pourraient avoir un impact sévère sur les populations migratrices. Nous avons étudié l'impact du climat, aux échelles locales et régionales, et de la disponibilité des ressources sur la phénologie des migrations de printemps et d'automne d'un ongulé migrateur à longue distance, le caribou migrateur, *Rangifer tarandus*, des troupeaux Rivière-George et Rivière-aux-Feuilles dans le Nord-du-Québec et au Labrador, Canada, sur 12 ans. Nous avons utilisé les données météorologiques du Modèle Régional Canadien du Climat, un indice climatique à large échelle, des données de couvert de neige et de glace et l'Indice de Végétation par Différence Normalisée, et testé leur effet sur les dates de départ et d'arrivée de 377 migrations printanières et 499 migrations automnales de femelles caribous. Depuis 2000, à l'exception de l'arrivée au printemps, les migrations se déroulent plus tôt. L'arrivée au printemps était retardée lorsque les caribous rencontraient durant leur migration des températures douces et d'abondantes précipitations, une fonte des neiges précoce pouvant induire une augmentation des coûts de déplacement. À taille de population élevée, l'arrivée sur l'aire d'estivage était retardée tandis que le départ à l'automne était avancé, les caribous limitant ainsi le temps passé sur l'aire d'été afin de limiter la compétition pour la ressource estivale. Pendant l'automne, les caribous semblaient ajuster leurs déplacements aux conditions rencontrées en cours de route car ils arrivaient plus tôt lors de mois de novembre doux accompagnés de fortes précipitations de neige, limitant ainsi le coût de se déplacer dans de la neige fraîche et profonde. Comme de nombreuses espèces migratrices, la plupart des troupeaux de caribous sont en déclin et il est crucial de déterminer quels facteurs environnementaux affectent les populations migratrices. Notre étude contribue à la compréhension de l'impact du climat local et des changements climatiques sur les espèces migratrices terrestres.

## Abstract

Long-distance migrant species are facing changes in the phenology of natural processes linked to global climate changes. Mismatch between the onset of resources and arrival on breeding grounds or changes in the conditions faced during migration such as early snowmelt in northern environments could have severe impacts on migrant populations. We investigated the impact of local and broad-scale climate and of the availability of forage resources on the timing of the spring and fall migrations of a long-distance migratory ungulate, the migratory caribou (*Rangifer tarandus*) from the Rivière-George and Rivière-aux-Feuilles herds in northern Québec and Labrador, Canada, for 12 years. We tested the effect of meteorological data from the Canadian Regional Climate Model, a large-scale climate index, snow and ice cover data, and the Normalized Difference Vegetation Index on the departure and arrival dates of 377 spring migrations and 499 fall migrations of female caribou. Since 2000, except for the spring arrival, migrations tend to occur earlier. Spring arrival was delayed when caribou encountered mild temperatures and abundant precipitation during their migration, as early snowmelt may increase cost of movements. At high population size, arrival on summer range was delayed while fall departure was advanced, caribou limiting time spent on summer range to limit competition for summer forage. During fall, caribou adjusted their migration to conditions *en route* as they arrived earlier if November was snowy and mild, limiting the costs of moving through deep snow. Like numerous migrant species, most caribou herds are declining and it is crucial to assess which environmental factors affect migrant populations. Our study contributes to the understanding of the impact of local weather conditions and climate change on migratory land mammals.

## **Introduction**

Migration is a key habitat selection strategy allowing species to follow broad-scale changes in resource availability and abundance (van der Graaf et al. 2006), and reducing the risk of predation (McKinnon et al. 2010). Migration is expected to improve fitness by increasing adult survival rate and/or reproductive success (Rasmussen et al. 2007). Migrant species, however, are facing threats related to human development and climate change (Bolger et al. 2008, Robinson et al. 2009) and several migrant populations are currently decreasing (Bolger et al. 2008, Both et al. 2010). Climate change is likely responsible for some of the observed declines (Robinson et al. 2009), particularly in northern environments where changes appear to be more drastic (Graversen et al. 2008), notably by modifying the phenology of several natural processes (Parmesan & Yohe 2003).

Migrations to breeding areas often coincide with peaks in resource emergence or productivity (Møller et al. 2008). This synchronicity is essential to provide females with sufficient energy to rear their offspring (Jonzén et al. 2007, Post & Forchhammer 2008). Observed changes in resource phenology with a progressive advancement of the onset of resources availability (Parmesan & Yohe 2003) could lead to a mismatch between the time of arrival on breeding areas and the peak in resource productivity. Such a mismatch has been reported for numerous migratory species of birds (Møller et al. 2008), terrestrial mammals (Post & Forchhammer 2008), and marine mammals (Anderson et al. 2013). This asynchrony may translate into lower reproductive success for females, with, ultimately, negative consequences for population dynamics (Møller et al. 2008, Post & Forchhammer 2008). Individuals mostly rely on photoperiod (Bauer et al. 2011) or circannual cycles (Helm et al. 2013) to time their migrations. However, fine-tuning can be achieved through environmental cues (Visser et al. 2010) such as local weather (Gordo et al. 2005) or resources availability, notably when these resources are used to build the energy reserves needed for migration (Gordo et al. 2005).

Factors that may influence the timing of migration in northern regions are the onset and duration of the growing season (Post & Forchhammer 2008). Species could benefit by arriving earlier on summer ranges in response to the earlier onset of vegetation growth

(Jonzén et al. 2007). A longer period during which suitable conditions prevail on summer ranges could delay departure date toward wintering ranges (Jenni & Kéry 2003). Arrival on seasonal ranges could also be influenced by conditions encountered during migration. Animals may use environmental cues during migration to adjust their pace (Tøttrup et al. 2008) or arrival dates or may follow the emergence of resources along the migration route (van der Graaf et al. 2006). On the other hand, adverse weather conditions can increase the cost of movements and slow down the migration (Gordo 2007, Robinson et al. 2009). In terrestrial mammals, early snowmelt or abundant fresh, powdery snow may increase the costs of locomotion because energy expenditures increase with sinking depth (Fancy & White 1987). Changes in the phenology of ice formation and thawing could also alter migration, as individuals have to wait for suitable ice conditions to cross large water bodies and limit the risk of drowning (Poole et al. 2010).

Migratory caribou, *Rangifer tarandus*, are long-distance migrant ungulates widespread in northern environments. They undertake migrations from boreal forests in spring to reach calving grounds located in tundra where they spend the summer (Taillon et al. 2012b). A mismatch has been observed between the arrival date on calving grounds and the onset of vegetation growth in one herd (Post & Forchhammer 2008), but little is known about potential impacts of climate change on other components of caribou migration such as the timing of the fall migration. In the context of a global decline in *Rangifer* populations (Vors & Boyce 2009) and pan-arctic global changes, it is crucial to assess how climate variables affect the timing of migrations in caribou.

Using a long-term database, we investigated the effects of snow and ice cover, temperature, precipitation, broad scale climatic variations, and resource abundance on departure and arrival dates of the spring and fall migrations of migratory caribou from the Rivière-George (RGH) and Rivière-aux-Feuilles (RFH) herds in northern Québec and Labrador, Canada. We also considered population size because it can affect the timing of migration (Hinkes et al. 2005). We hypothesized that adverse snow conditions would impede migration and that caribou would adjust their departure dates to migrate under favorable conditions according to local and broad-scale environmental cues. During mild

winters, we expected caribou to depart earlier in anticipation of an early spring but also expected that conditions promoting an early snowmelt during spring migration would delay arrival on calving grounds. We also expected arrival on calving grounds to be delayed during years when snow was abundant on the calving grounds. In fall, we expected departure date would be delayed as long as forage resources were available on the summer range. Similar to spring migrations, we expected arrival on winter grounds to be delayed as snow precipitation along caribou migratory routes increased.

## **Methods**

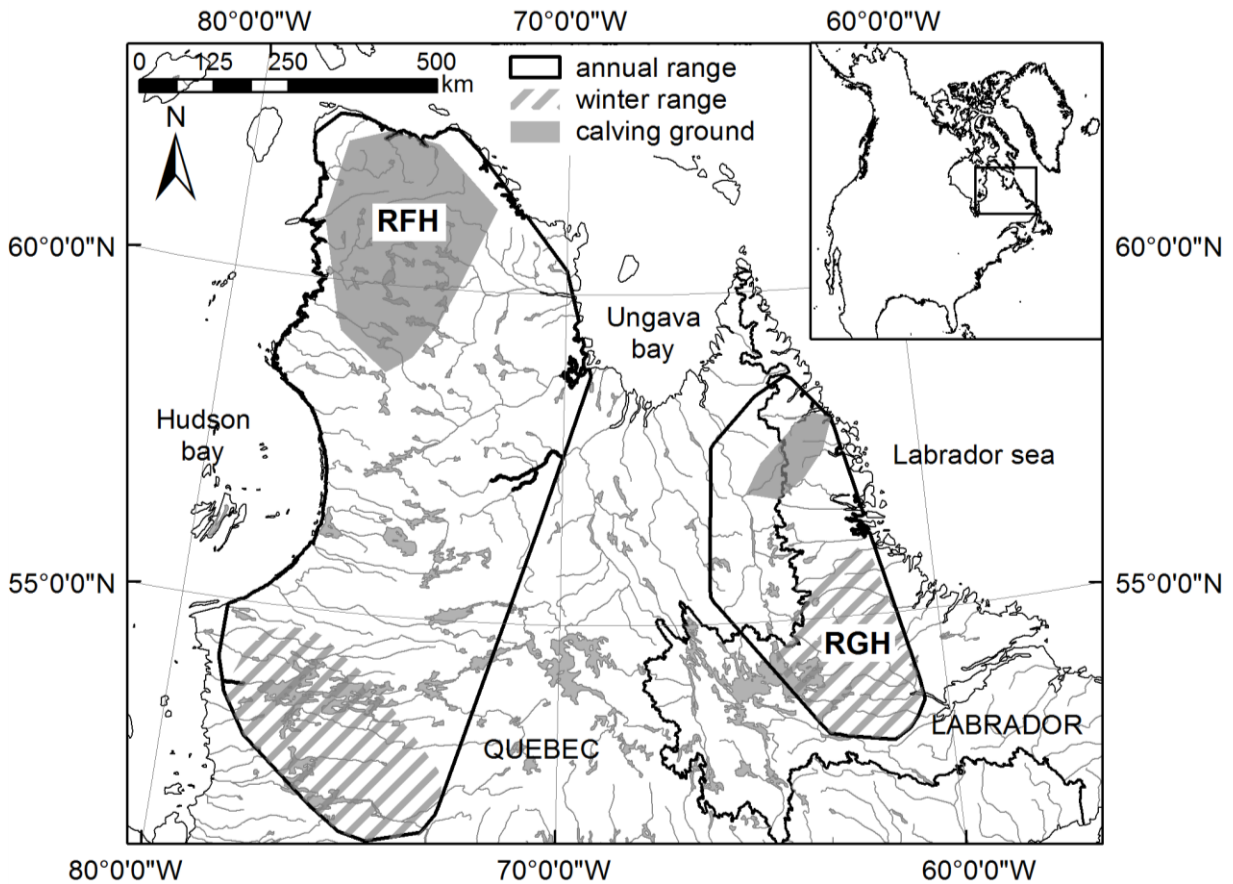
### *Study area and caribou herds*

The RGH and RFH range about 1 000 000 km<sup>2</sup> in northern Québec and Labrador (Figure 3.1). Although the wintering areas of the two herds may overlap in some years, their calving grounds are usually located >800 km apart (57°N-65°W for RGH; 58°N-73°W for RFH). Females usually leave their winter range in April and arrive on calving grounds in late May after a migration of several hundreds of kilometers (RGH: 350 km ± 161 SD; RFH: 615 km ± 248 SD). They migrate back to their wintering areas between October and December.

### *Tracking data*

We used the locations of 120 females for RGH and 116 females for RFH equipped with ARGOS satellite-tracking collars (Telonics, ARGOS platform, Mesa, Arizona) between January 2000 and December 2011 (female/year RGH: 23 ± 8 SD; RFH: 27 ± 15 SD). We captured most females using a net-gun fired from a helicopter (Bookhout 1996) on wintering areas in February or March. We considered individuals to be independent because capture sites within a given year were spread over several thousands km<sup>2</sup>. We monitored females on average 2.1 years ± 0.1 (SD) but some individuals were followed for up to 8 years. We usually collected locations every 5 days (85.4% of the database), but frequency ranged from 1 location every day (0.2%) to 1 every 7 days (0.7%). We filtered the data using a similar algorithm as Austin et al. (2003) to eliminate aberrant locations leading to movements higher than 50 kilometers per day (Boulet et al. 2007). Capture, handling and monitoring of caribou complied with the American Society of Mammalogists

(Sikes et al. 2011). and the Canadian Council on Animal Care guidelines, and were approved by the University Laval Animal Care committee and by the Ministère des Forêts, de la Faune et des Parcs du Québec (MFFP) Animal Care committee.



**Figure 3.1.** Annual ranges, winter ranges (striped areas) and calving grounds (shaded areas) of the Rivière-George (RGH) and Rivière-aux-Feuilles (RFH) migratory caribou herds, located in northern Québec and Labrador. We delineated ranges using 100% Minimum Convex Polygons based on ARGOS locations collected on 54 females for RGH and 60 females for RFH in 2010.

#### *Demographic data*

During the last decades, RGH and RFH have shown large variations in population size. RGH numbers increased from at least 60 000 individuals in the 1950's (Rasiulis 2015) to 823 000 ( $\pm 104\ 000$ , 90% CI) individuals in 1993, then decreased to 385 000 ( $\pm 108\ 000$ ) caribou in 2001 (Couturier et al. 2004), 27 600 ( $\pm 2760$ ) caribou in 2012 (MFFP unpublished data), and 14 200 ( $\pm 710$ ) caribou in 2014 (MFFP unpublished data). RFH was indentified in 1975 when its size was estimated at 56 000 individuals (Le Hénaff 1976). The herd reached ca. 628 000 caribou in 2001 (Couturier et al. 2004) and declined to

430 000 ( $\pm$  98 900) individuals in 2011 (MFFP *unpublished data*). We considered variations in population size in the models by using annual estimates for the two herds from Rasiulis (2015). We computed annual population sizes by fitting a polynomial regression spline to these estimates with the "loess" function in *R* software (R Core Team 2015).

#### *Climate data*

To describe local weather, we used data from the Canadian Regional Climate Model (CRCM, v4.3) produced by the Ouranos Consortium (Music & Caya 2007, de Elía & Côté 2010). The domain of the CRCM simulation is centered over the province of Québec (111×87 grid cells of 45×45 km). The CRCM simulation is driven by a time series of atmospheric variables taken from the global atmospheric reanalyses ERA-Interim that give a numerical description of climate since 1979 (Dee et al. 2011). Details about the CRCM simulation are provided by de Elía and Côté (2010). We used the CRCM to obtain temperature, precipitation, snow water equivalent, and snow depth data. We used monthly averages of the mean daily temperature (°C), daily precipitation (mm/day), and snow water equivalent (mm). We did not use snow depth because it was highly correlated ( $r = 0.99$ ) with snow water equivalent. We associated monthly weather data with each caribou location using the corresponding grid cell of the CRCM. As caribou commonly used different cells during a given month, we computed average monthly values of weather variables by taking all locations occurring during a given month and calculating the mean value of weather variables associated with these locations. We computed mean winter values of weather variables using the same method from January to March.

For broad-scale climate, we used the North Atlantic Oscillation index (NAO). NAO integrates precipitation and temperature data, and is based on the difference in atmospheric pressure between subpolar and subtropical regions of the North Atlantic (Hurrell 1995). We used monthly and winter NAO values. In northern Québec, winter NAO is negatively correlated with snowfall and winter temperature (Couturier et al. 2009b), however these relationships are weaker for the other seasons (Coulibaly 2006). To interpret the effect of NAO on the departure or arrival dates when it was significant, we related weather variables with monthly NAO values using weather data from 4 weather stations of Environment

Canada (Kuuujuaq: 58°06'N-68°25'W, data spanning from 1947 to 2005; Schefferville: 54°48'N-66°49'W, 1949-1993; La Grande: 53°38'N-77°42'W, 1976-2005, Goose Bay: 53°19'N-60°25'W, 1942-2011; climat.meteo.gc.ca). We fitted linear mixed models using the "*lme4*" package (Bates et al. 2014) in *R* software with monthly NAO as the response variable, monthly average temperature, total rainfall and total snowfall as explanatory variables and weather station as a random factor.

### *Snow and ice cover*

We assessed snow and ice cover at each caribou location using the snow cover data from MODIS satellite images (Hall et al. 2006). The MODIS/Terra Snow cover images represent the maximum snow cover extent over an 8-day period. At each location we estimated snow cover (snow pixels/land pixels) and ice cover (ice pixels/water pixels) within a 10-km radius circle centered on the location. Pixels with a cloud value were excluded from the snow and ice cover calculations. We set the radius of the circle at 10 km, which was the mean daily distance travelled by females when excluding the winter break (10.2 km/day  $\pm$  7.7 SD,  $n = 236$ ; Le Corre et al. 2014). We considered snow and ice cover values as missing values when clouds covered more than 50% of the 10-km buffer area. We computed average monthly values of snow and ice cover as described in the *climate data* section.

### *Plant productivity*

We used the Normalized Difference Vegetation Index (NDVI) as an index of plant productivity. NDVI has been used to describe plant productivity and phenology in arctic habitats (Myneni et al. 1997) and to assess their effects on life-history traits in ungulates (Couturier et al. 2009b). We used NDVI data from the Advanced Very High Resolution Radiometer (AVHRR) satellite images processed by the Canada Centre for Remote Sensing (Latifovic et al. 2005). AVHRR images are 10-day image composites at a resolution of 1 km. At each location, we calculated the mean NDVI value within the same 10-km buffer areas used to estimate snow and ice cover. We excluded pixels corresponding to water and pixels with a thick cloud shadow according to the quality mask layer of the AVHRR images. We considered NDVI value as missing when clouds represented more than 50% of



the buffer area. We computed average monthly NDVI values as described in the *climate data* section.

### *Departure and arrival dates*

Movement rates differ when caribou are migrating and when they are on seasonal ranges (Le Corre et al. 2014). We assessed departure and arrival dates of migrations by looking at abrupt changes in caribou movement patterns over the year. We characterized the movements of caribou using the First-Passage Time analysis (FPT, Fauchald and Tveraa 2003) that summarizes the velocity and the tortuosity of the movement along a path. FPT corresponds to the time needed by an individual to cross a circle of given radius centered on each location of an animal path. Fast, long-distance movements result in low FPT value, while pauses in annual movements result in high FPT values (Le Corre et al. 2014). Based on the work of Le Corre et al. (2014) on the same data base, we used a circle of 25 km radius to compute FPT (see Annexe 4 for details). We then applied a segmentation process, developed by Lavielle (2005), on FPT profiles to detect departures and arrivals of migrations. This method allows detecting changes in a signal by locating breakpoints along the signal (see Annexe 4 for details). We segmented FPT profiles into low and high FPT value segments, discriminating between fast, directional movements such as migration and slow, tortuous movements expected on seasonal ranges. Hereafter we use "breaks" to designate pauses in annual movement, *i.e.*, periods of the year during which individuals slow down their displacements and associated with high FPT values. For each female, the departure date corresponded to the breakpoint, along its FTP profile, marking the end of the winter break. Arrival date was the breakpoint marking the beginning of the calving break (see Le Corre et al. 2014 for details). Among 377 spring migrations made by 178 females, we identified 372 departure and 354 arrival dates. In fall, we distinguished 2 types of movement: pre-migration, from the departure of the summer range until the rutting period, and fall migration, corresponding to the long-distance movement, following the rutting period, towards the winter range. We only considered the 2<sup>nd</sup> movement during fall in the analyses. A break in October preceded the fall migration in 47% of the paths. We used the breakpoint marking the end of this break as the departure date. When this break was missing, we completed the analysis by computing the Net-Squared Displacements

(NSD, Bunnefeld et al. 2011), *i.e.*, the squared distance between fall locations and a reference location, here the 1<sup>st</sup> location of the winter break. We used the location for which the NSD started to decrease steadily as departure date because migration movement was associated with a strong decrease in NSD. Arriving on winter range, individuals slowed down, leading to a sudden increase in FPT. We used this breakpoint as arrival date. Among 499 fall migrations made by 230 females, we identified 464 departure dates and 471 arrival dates. Finally, we calculated migration distance in spring and fall using the Euclidean distance between the departure and arrival locations of the migrations.

For each migration phase, we tested the effect of climate variables measured during the month for which most of the departures or arrivals occurred and during the preceding month. For spring departure, we tested the effect of conditions in April (65.6% of the departures) and during winter. For fall departure, we tested the effects of conditions in October (78.0% of the departures) and September. For arrival dates, we used June (64.7% of the arrivals) and May in spring, and December (55.0% of the arrivals) and November in fall. We grouped explanatory variables into 5 categories (Table 3.1): snow and ice (ice cover, snow cover, snow water equivalent), local weather (precipitation, temperature), broad-scale climate (NAO), vegetation (NDVI), and herd characteristics (herd identity, population size, migration distance). Vegetation was always included in models in interaction with population size. We did not use snow and ice covers to model spring departure dates because they were 100% from January to April. We used the vegetation category only in June, September and October. We tested multicollinearity among all explanatory variables for each migration phase with the variance inflation factor (VIF, Zuur et al. 2010). We discarded snow water equivalent in October for fall departure (VIF > 5). Snow water equivalent in April for spring departure also has VIF > 5 but it was essentially correlated with snow water equivalent in winter ( $r = 0.83$ ). We kept both variables but never used them in the same models.

**Table 3.1.** Variables used to investigate changes in the phenology of the spring and fall migrations of the Rivières-aux-Feuilles and Rivière-George migratory caribou herds. We indicate, for each variable, the time period over which we averaged the data.

Migration phase	Period over which data were averaged	Variable categories				
		Snow and ice	Local weather	Broad-scale climate	Vegetation	Herd characteristics
Spring departure	Winter (January – March)	Swe	St + pcp	NAO	-	Herd_ID + pop_size + dist_mig
	April	(swe) <sup>a</sup>	St + pcp	NAO	-	
Spring arrival	May	sc + ic + swe	St + pcp	NAO	-	Herd_ID + pop_size + dist_mig
	June	sc + ic + swe	St + pcp	NAO	NDVI	
Fall departure	September	sc + ic + swe	st + pcp	NAO	NDVI	Herd_ID + pop_size + dist_mig
	October	sc + ic + (swe) <sup>a</sup>	st + pcp	NAO	NDVI	
Fall arrival	November	sc + ic + swe	st + pcp	NAO	-	Herd_ID + pop_size + dist_mig
	December	sc + ic + swe	st + pcp	NAO	-	

<sup>a</sup> Brackets indicate variables with a variance inflation factor >5. swe: snow water equivalent; sc: snow cover; ic: ice cover; st: temperature; pcp: precipitation; herd\_ID: RGH used as the reference category; pop\_size: estimated population size (x10<sup>3</sup>); dist\_mig: distance of migration

### Statistical analyses

We fitted linear mixed models with the "lme4" package for spring departure, spring arrival, fall departure, and fall arrival to detect temporal trends in the timing of the migrations from 2000 to 2011. We included female identity as a random factor and year as the explanatory variable. We transformed spring departure dates ( $x^2$ ) to meet the normality of the residuals and homogeneity of variance assumptions.

We used linear mixed models to assess the effects of climate variables on the spring and fall departure and arrival dates with female identity as a random factor. We built biologically meaningful candidate models composed of various combinations of the categories of variables defined above to test hypotheses (see Annexe 5, Tables A3.1-4 for the complete list of models). We ranked all models, including a null model with no

explanatory variable, using AICc weights. We considered models with  $\Delta\text{AICc} \leq 2$  as equivalent and calculated parameter estimates and 95% CI using model averaging (Burnham & Anderson 2002). We provide parameter estimates with their SE and 95% CI.

**Table 3.2.** Most parsimonious mixed-effects models explaining variations in the phenology of the spring and fall migrations of the Rivières-aux-Feuilles and Rivière-George migratory caribou herds for each migration phase, with their AICc weight ( $\omega_i$ ). Models that received equivalent support from the data ( $\Delta\text{AIC} < 2$ ) are presented.

Migration phase	Most parsimonious models	$\omega_i$
Spring departure	swe_apr + st_winter + pcp_winter + st_apr + pcp_apr + herd ID + pop_size + dist_mig	0.60
	swe_winter + st_winter + pcp_winter + st_apr + pcp_apr + herd ID + pop_size + dist_mig	0.25
Spring arrival	swe_may + sc_may + ic_may + swe_june + sc_june + ic_june + NAO_may + NAO_june + NDVI_june * pop_size + herd ID + dist_mig	0.71
	swe_may + sc_may + ic_may + swe_june + sc_june + ic_june + st_may + pcp_may + st_june + pcp_june + NDVI_june * pop_size + herd ID + dist_mig	0.26
Fall departure	swe_sept + sc_sept + ic_sept + sc_oct + ic_oct + st_sept + pcp_sep + st_oct + pcp_oct + NDVI_sept * pop_size + NDVI_oct * pop_size + herd ID + dist_mig	0.99
Fall arrival	swe_nov + sc_nov + ic_nov + swe_dec + sc_dec + ic_dec + st_nov + pcp_nov + st_dec + pcp_dec + herd ID + pop_size + dist_mig	0.60
	swe_nov + sc_nov + ic_nov + swe_dec + sc_dec + ic_dec + NAO_nov + NAO_dec + herd ID + pop_size + dist_mig	0.40

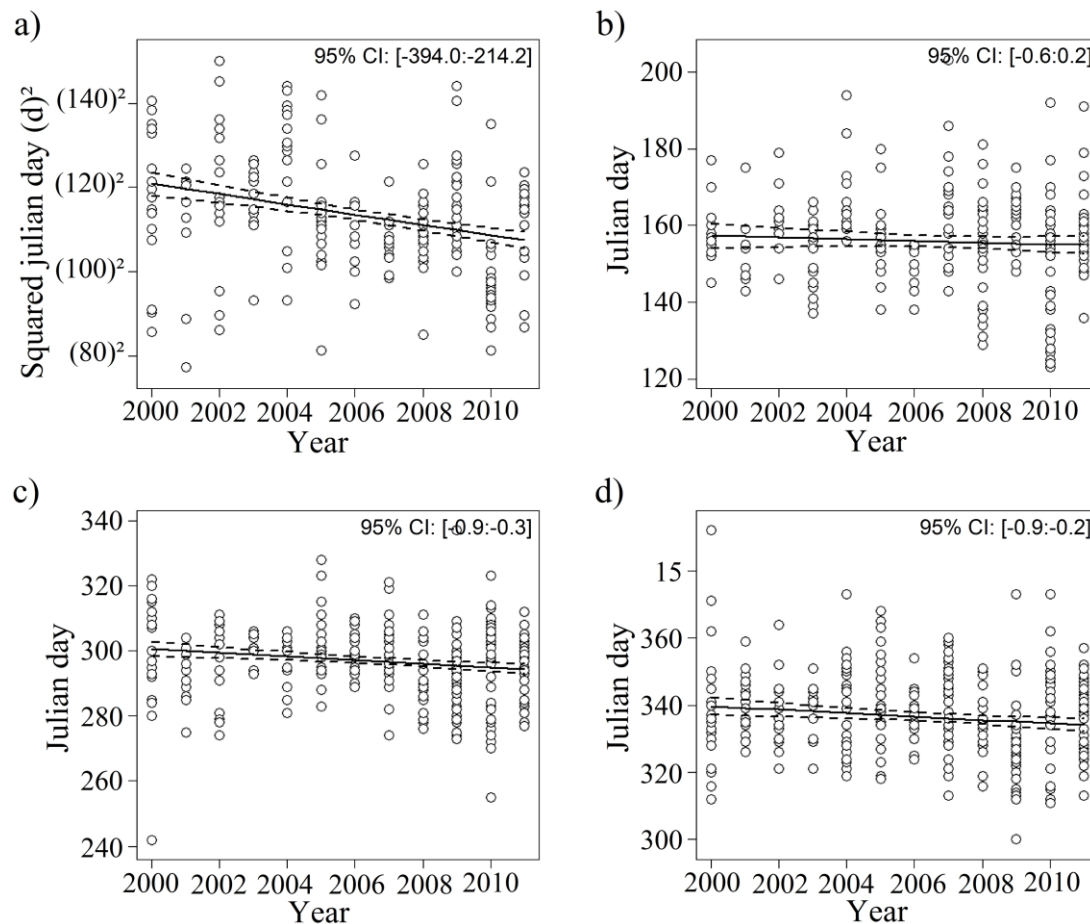
swe: snow water equivalent; sc: snow cover; ic: ice cover; st: temperature; pcp: precipitation; herd\_ID: RGH used as the reference category; pop\_size: estimated population size ( $\times 10^3$ ); dist\_mig: distance of migration; sept: September; oct: October; nov: November; dec: December.

## Results

### *Spring departure*

Caribou started their spring migration increasingly earlier and advanced their departure by about 14 days during the study period (year:  $\beta = -304.1 \pm 45.9$ , 95% CI = [-394.0:-214.2]; Figure 3.2a). According to the most parsimonious models for the spring departure date (Table 3.2), caribou from RFH started their migration on average 7.4 days ( $\pm$

3.0) sooner than caribou from RGH (Table 3.3a). Spring departure occurred earlier at low population size and increase of 100 000 individuals delayed departure by ca. 3.5 days. Caribou also departed earlier in years with mild winter temperatures (Table 3.3a), migration starting 1.9 days earlier for each increase of 1 degree (Figure 3.3a). Departure was delayed in years with abundant precipitation in April. Finally, longer migration led to earlier departure, caribou advancing their migration by 1.8 days for an increase of 100 km of migration distance. We did not detect changes in spring migration distance over our study period (distance of migration ~ year :  $\beta = 8.0 \pm 4.3$ , 95% CI = [-0.4:16.4], female identity as a random factor). Other parameter estimates did not differ from 0 (Table 3.3a).

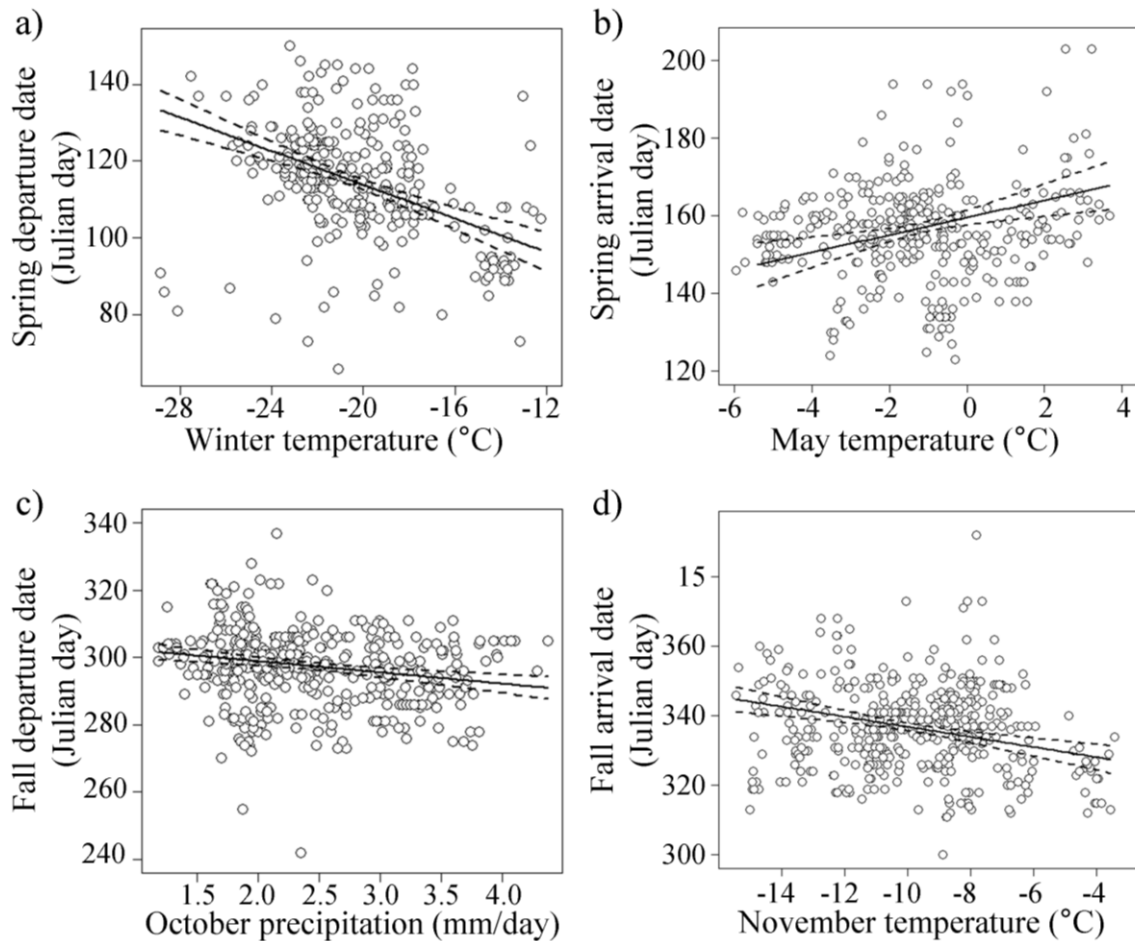


**Figure 3.2.** Changes in migration phenology of migratory caribou from northern Québec and Labrador between 2000 and 2011 with fitted trends and 95% CI (dashed lines). a) Spring migration departure (dates in squared Julian days); b) Spring migration arrival; c) Fall migration departure; d) Fall migration arrival.

**Table 3.3.** Parameter estimates from the best mixed-effects models (female identity as random factor) explaining variations in a) the departure date and b) the arrival date of the spring migration. Parameters were calculated by model averaging. Variables for which 95% CI exclude 0 are considered statistically significant and are indicated in bold.

a) <i>Spring migration departure</i>						b) <i>Spring migration arrival</i>				
Variable category	Variable	Estimate		95% CI		Variable	Estimate	SE	95% CI	
Snow and ice	swe_wint	0.01	0.02	-0.03	0.05	swe_may	0.008	0.02	-0.03	0.05
						sc_may	0.696	7.31	-13.63	15.02
						ic_may	-3.330	8.58	-20.14	13.48
	swe_apr	0.03	0.02	-0.01	0.07	swe_june	0.041	0.02	-0.003	0.08
						sc_june	4.119	4.02	-3.77	12.01
						ic_june	1.084	2.27	-3.37	5.53
Local weather	<b>st_wint</b>	<b>-1.88</b>	<b>0.28</b>	<b>-2.43</b>	<b>-1.32</b>	<b>st_may</b>	<b>1.602</b>	<b>0.59</b>	<b>0.44</b>	<b>2.77</b>
	pcp_wint	-1.41	2.43	-6.16	3.35	<b>pcp_may</b>	<b>3.261</b>	<b>0.91</b>	<b>1.48</b>	<b>5.04</b>
	st_apr	0.65	0.37	-0.07	1.38	st_june	0.212	0.59	-0.94	1.36
	<b>pcp_apr</b>	<b>3.70</b>	<b>0.97</b>	<b>1.80</b>	<b>5.61</b>	pcp_june	-0.462	0.98	-2.39	1.46
Broad-scale climate						<b>NAO_may</b>	<b>4.97</b>	<b>1.14</b>	<b>2.75</b>	<b>7.20</b>
						NAO_june	-0.32	1.36	-2.99	2.35
Vegetation						<b>NDVI_june</b>	<b>-0.10</b>	<b>0.05</b>	<b>-0.19</b>	<b>-0.01</b>
						<b>* pop_size</b>				
Herd characteristics	<b>pop_size</b>	<b>0.03</b>	<b>0.01</b>	<b>0.02</b>	<b>0.05</b>	herd_ID	-4.71	3.65	-11.87	2.45
	<b>herd_ID</b>	<b>-7.44</b>	<b>2.98</b>	<b>-13.28</b>	<b>-1.60</b>	<b>dist_mig</b>	<b>0.03</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>0.02</b>	<b>0.04</b>
	<b>dist_mig</b>	<b>-0.02</b>	<b>0.005</b>	<b>-0.03</b>	<b>-0.01</b>					

swe: snow water equivalent; sc: snow cover; ic: ice cover; st: temperature; pcp: precipitation; herd\_ID: RGH used as the reference category; pop\_size: estimated population size (x10<sup>3</sup>); wint: winter; apr: April.

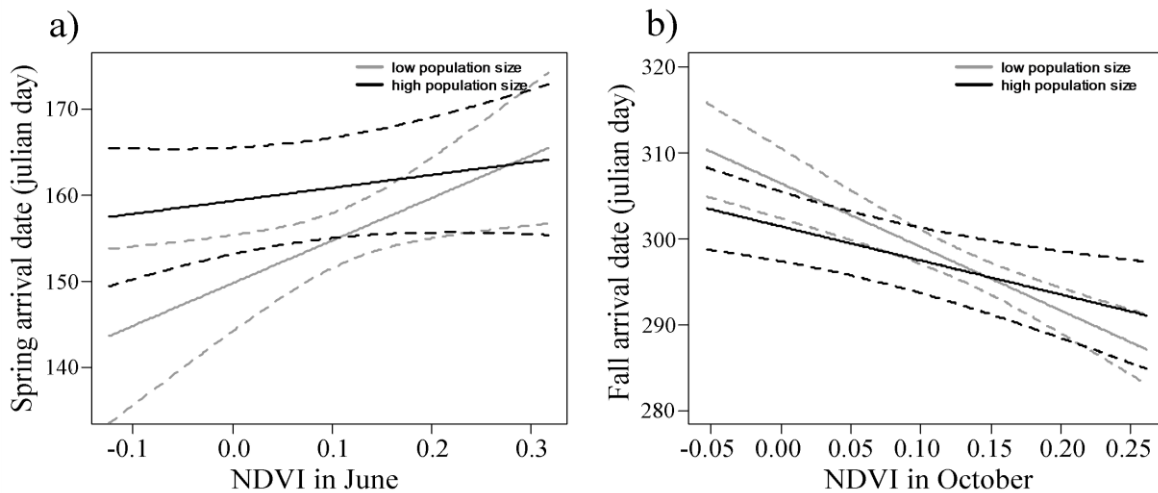


**Figure 3.3.** Significant relationships with fitted trends and 95% CI (dashed lines) between a) spring migration departure date and mean daily temperature for winter (January to March), b) spring migration arrival date and mean daily temperature in May, c) fall migration departure date and daily October precipitation and d) fall migration arrival date and mean daily temperature in November for the migratory caribou from Northern Québec and Labrador between 2000 and 2011.

### *Spring arrival*

We found no trend in the arrival date of the spring migration over the study period (year:  $\beta = -0.2 \pm 0.2$ , 95% CI =  $[-0.6:0.2]$ , Figure 3.2b). Few of the variables included in the best models for the spring arrival date (Table 3.2) had a significant influence on arrival date of the migration (Table 3.3b). Herd ID did not influence arrival date but longer migration led to late arrivals (Table 3.3b), an increase of 100 km of migration distance delayed arrival by 2.8 days. At low population size, arrival dates were positively related with NDVI in June, while at high population size arrivals were late even for low NDVI values (Figure 3.4a). Arrival date was delayed in years when caribou faced abundant

precipitation and warm temperatures during the migration (Figure 3.3b), an increase of 1 degree in daily temperature in May delaying the arrival by 1.6 days and an increase of 1 mm in daily precipitation in May, by 3.3 days. Finally we observed a positive relationship between NAO in May and arrival date. NAO in May was negatively related to temperature (temperature:  $\beta = -0.04 \pm 0.02$ , 95% CI = [-0.1:-0.003]) but not with precipitation (rainfall:  $\beta = -0.002 \pm 0.002$ , 95% CI = [-0.002:0.007]; snowfall:  $\beta = -0.0003 \pm 0.004$ , 95% CI = [-0.007:0.007]).



**Figure 3.4.** Effect of a) NDVI in June on spring migration arrival date, and b) NDVI in October on fall migration departure date for migratory caribou from northern Québec and Labrador between 2000 and 2011, according to population size (high population size in black: 500 000 individuals; low population size in grey: 200 000 individuals). Fitted trends are presented with 95% CI (dashed lines).

#### *Fall departure*

Departure of the fall migration occurred progressively earlier, shifting by 6.6 days during the study period (year:  $\beta = -0.6 \pm 0.1$ , 95% CI = [-0.9:-0.3], Figure 3.2c). According to the most parsimonious model for the fall departure date (Table 3.2), departure occurred sooner as distance of migration increased (Table 3.4a): a 100 km increase in migration distance advanced departure by 1.8 days. Fall migration distance increased during the study period (distance of migration  $\sim$  year:  $\beta = 7.2 \pm 3.3$ , 95% CI = [0.7:13.6], female identity as a random factor). Departure date was delayed in years when snow water equivalent was high in September, and when there was little precipitation in October (Figure 3.3c), a decrease of 1 mm in mean daily precipitation delaying departure by 3.3 days. Departure



date occurred earlier as NDVI values in October increased, however this relationship tended to disappear as population size increased (Figure 3.4b).

### *Fall arrival*

Caribou advanced their arrival on winter range by 5.5 days during the study period (year:  $\beta = -0.5 \pm 0.2$ , 95% CI = [-0.9:-0.2], Figure 3.2d). According to the most parsimonious models (Table 3.2) caribou from RFH arrived on their winter range 6.9 days ( $\pm 2.5$ ) earlier than caribou from RGH. Arrival date was positively related to population size: increasing population size by 100 000 individuals delayed arrival by 2.0 days and increasing migration distance by 100 km delayed arrival by 2.4 days (Table 3.4b). Caribou terminated their fall migration sooner in years when snow water equivalent was high and temperature was mild in November (Figure 3.3d) because an increased of 10 mm of snow water equivalent in November advanced arrival by 1.4 days and an increase of 1 degree in November temperature by 1.1 days. Caribou also arrived earlier when precipitation were abundant at their arrival on the winter range in December because they arrived 2.8 days earlier for each increase of 1 mm in daily precipitation (Table 3.4b). Finally, fall arrival dates were negatively related with NAO in November and positively related with NAO in December. In November, NAO was negatively related with temperature (temperature:  $\beta = -0.1 \pm 0.03$ , 95% CI = [-0.2:-0.09]) and snow precipitation (snowfall:  $\beta = -0.006 \pm 0.003$ , 95% CI = [-0.01:-0.001]) but not with (rainfall:  $\beta = -0.01 \pm 0.006$ , 95% CI = [-0.001:0.02]). In December, NAO was negatively related with temperature (temperature:  $\beta = -0.2 \pm 0.02$ , 95% CI = [-0.2:-0.1]) but not with precipitation (rainfall:  $\beta = -0.002 \pm 0.02$ , 95% CI = [-0.03:0.03]; snowfall:  $\beta = -0.004 \pm 0.003$ , 95% CI = [-0.002:-0.01]).

**Table 3.4.** Parameter estimates from the best mixed-effects models (female identity as random factor) explaining variations in a) the departure date and b) the arrival date of the fall migration. Parameters were calculated by model averaging. Variables for which 95% CI exclude 0 are considered statistically significant and are indicated in bold.

a) <i>Fall migration departure</i>						b) <i>Fall migration arrival</i>				
Variable category	Variable	Estimate	SE	95% CI		Variable	Estimate	SE	95% CI	
Snow and ice	<b>swe_sept</b>	<b>2.50</b>	<b>0.52</b>	<b>1.48</b>	<b>3.52</b>	<b>swe_nov</b>	<b>-0.14</b>	<b>0.05</b>	<b>-0.24</b>	<b>-0.05</b>
	sc_sept	3.80	7.88	-11.64	19.24	sc_nov	-5.24	10.20	-25.23	14.75
	ic_sept	6.28	7.14	-7.72	20.28	ic_nov	0.12	3.59	-6.91	7.15
	sc_oct	-2.48	3.41	-9.16	4.20	swe_dec	0.04	0.03	-0.03	0.10
	ic_oct	-2.02	2.43	-6.79	2.74	sc_dec	29.90	41.22	-50.90	110.70
Local weather	st_sept	1.07	0.55	-0.004	2.15	<b>st_nov</b>	<b>-1.10</b>	<b>0.30</b>	<b>-1.69</b>	<b>-0.50</b>
	pcp_sept	-0.19	0.52	-1.20	0.83	pcp_nov	0.39	1.13	-1.82	2.60
	st_oct	0.39	0.41	-0.41	1.20	st_dec	0.22	0.19	-0.16	0.60
	<b>pcp_oct</b>	<b>-3.33</b>	<b>0.82</b>	<b>-4.95</b>	<b>-1.72</b>	<b>pcp_dec</b>	<b>-2.79</b>	<b>1.05</b>	<b>-4.84</b>	<b>-0.74</b>
Broad-scale climate						<b>NAO_nov</b>	<b>-2.78</b>	<b>0.78</b>	<b>-4.31</b>	<b>-1.26</b>
						<b>NAO_dec</b>	<b>1.46</b>	<b>0.35</b>	<b>0.78</b>	<b>2.14</b>
Vegetation	NDVI_sept * pop_size	0.001	0.04	-0.08	0.09					
	<b>NDVI_oct * pop_size</b>	<b>0.11</b>	<b>0.05</b>	<b>0.02</b>	<b>0.21</b>					
Herd characteristics						<b>pop_size</b>	<b>0.02</b>	<b>0.01</b>	<b>0.01</b>	<b>0.03</b>
	herd_ID	1.90	2.42	-2.84	6.65	<b>herd_ID</b>	<b>-6.88</b>	<b>2.51</b>	<b>-11.80</b>	<b>-1.96</b>
	dist_mig	<b>-0.02</b>	<b>0.003</b>	<b>-0.02</b>	<b>-0.01</b>	<b>dist_mig</b>	<b>0.02</b>	<b>0.004</b>	<b>0.02</b>	<b>0.03</b>

swe: snow water equivalent; sc: snow cover; ic: ice cover; st: temperature; pcp: precipitation; herd\_ID: RGH used as the reference category; pop\_size: estimated population size ( $\times 10^3$ ); dist\_mid: distance of migration; sept: September; oct: October; nov: November; dec: December.

## Discussion

We assessed the effects of climate variables and vegetation productivity on the timing of migrations in 2 large migratory caribou herds in northern Québec and Labrador. Contrary to our predictions, snow and ice cover did not influence the timing of migrations. Resource availability, notably through an impact of competition, affected the timing of migration, but changes in departure and arrival dates were mostly related to local weather variables that affected snow quality and thus the costs of locomotion for migratory caribou.

### *Trends in the timing of spring and fall migrations*

Except for the spring arrival date, migrations occurred earlier throughout the 12-year study period. This trend is consistent with most observations of other long-distance migrants. Earlier departures in spring have been reported in bird species (Tøttrup et al. 2006). In contrast to short-distance migrants that stay longer on summer ranges and gradually move towards their winter ranges, long-distance migrants usually depart early in fall in anticipation of the environmental conditions that they will encounter during the migration (Jenni & Kéry 2003, Gordo 2007). Schaefer & Mahoney (2013) studied long-term changes in the timing of migration of a woodland caribou population in Newfoundland, but caribou from their study corresponded more to a short-distance migrant species, with migration < 100 km. Changes in the timing of the spring and fall migrations in their study were more related to changes in herd population size, individuals limiting time spent on the summer range at high population size.

We reported earlier departures and later arrivals for long migrations in spring and fall. Differences in timing of migrations have been reported between long and short-distance migrants, the former leaving sooner and arriving later on breeding sites (Tøttrup et al. 2006). Accordingly, difference in spring departure dates between the two herds was likely related to differences in the length of their migrations. Caribou from the RFH started their spring migration earlier than caribou from RGH. The main winter range of the RFH is located much further away from its calving ground than the winter range used by RGH. Caribou from the RFH migrated over a distance almost twice as long as those of the RGH (615 vs 350 km on average). The shift in fall departure date during the study period could

be partly explained by the increase in fall migration distance. However, fall migration only increased by 79 km and the change observed for departure date was greater than what we would expect if caribou only responded to migration distance. Moreover, migration distance can be affected by changes in population size, caribou wintering further from their calving ground at high population size to limit competition (Schaefer et al. 2000, Schmelzer et al. 2003). However, during the study period, despite both herds declining, we did not detect changes in the migration distance in spring and we observed longer migrations in fall, suggesting that changes in departure and arrival dates were mostly related to changes in conditions encountered during migration.

#### *En route conditions*

The timing of the spring migration was linked to weather conditions encountered by caribou during the migration. Departure dates in spring occurred earlier in mild winters and were delayed when precipitation were abundant in April. On the other hand, arrival dates of the spring migration were delayed in years of mild temperatures and abundant precipitation during migration. Taillon (2013) found the opposite effect of the May temperature for RFH. Here, we used estimated conditions encountered at each caribou location. In contrast, temperatures used by Taillon (2013) were from a weather station located about 300 km east of the calving ground and provided general weather conditions on the calving ground. Migrants that minimize the costs of movements during migration should have increased fitness: birds may use favorable winds (Alerstam 2011), caribou may travel on frozen lakes and rivers (Fancy & White 1987, Leblond et al. 2016) or use trails of packed snow. Deep, soft snow increases the energetic costs of movements for ungulates (Fancy & White 1987, Hénault-Richard et al. 2014). Duquette (1988) reported that caribou avoided moving in soft snow and delayed their migration in such conditions as we observed in years with abundant snow on the ground and heavy snowfall in April. Furthermore, migrating through melting snow could increase energy expenditures (Fancy & White 1987) and possibly slow down the migration. One of the effects of climate change in northern environments is the earlier onset of snowmelt caused by rising spring temperatures (Derksen & Brown 2012). Caribou could use winter temperature as a cue for the upcoming spring weather conditions. Early

departure dates during mild winters could limit the impact of poor snow conditions during migration.

In fall, contrary to our predictions, we observed an early arrival when caribou encountered abundant snow and mild temperatures during migration and abundant precipitation at the arrival, 2 variables that are expected to increase in fall with climate change (IPCC 2014). In birds, long-distance migrants depart earlier when individuals are expected to encounter harsh conditions during migration (Jenni & Kéry 2003, Gordo 2007). Therefore, timing of the fall migration seemed to depend more on the conditions *en route* than for spring migration (Gordo 2007). Thus, caribou could use the amount of precipitation in October as a cue to predict snow abundance during migration, and adjust their migration to limit the costs of moving through deep snow. The effect of temperature on the timing of fall migration was more variable, possibly because temperatures were relatively cold throughout the fall migration, with low perceived effects on snow quality. Mild temperatures in fall, however, could delay ice formation (Magnuson et al. 2000), and past observations have shown that the crossing of partially frozen lakes could increase the risk of injuries and drowning for caribou (Miller & Gunn 1986). Caribou could attempt to migrate before freeze-up, but the index of ice cover we used was too coarse to reliably test this idea.

#### *Effects of resource availability and accessibility*

Competition and resource availability on seasonal ranges influenced departure and arrival dates of caribou in spring and fall. We observed a delay in spring departure dates at high population size and in fall departure dates when snow water equivalent was high and NDVI was low during the pre-migration movement. Various responses to resource abundance and availability on departure range can be observed among migrant species (Gordo et al. 2005, Tøttrup et al. 2008). Individuals may stay on their seasonal ranges as long as conditions remain favorable, delaying their departure when resources are abundant (Tøttrup et al. 2008). Conversely, when individuals need to build energetic reserves before starting their migration, a decrease in food availability, such as in fall, can slow down the build-up of reserves and delay departure (Gordo et al. 2005). A decrease in food availability

is likely to occur at high population size, because of increased competition for food (Bonenfant et al. 2009) and is consistent with the delay we observed in departure dates in spring. Competition also appeared to delay arrival on calving ground when NDVI in June was low as also observed by Schaefer & Mahoney (2013). Summer food has been suggested as a key regulating factor of caribou populations (Crête & Huot 1993, Mahoney & Schaefer 2002b). Caribou can limit the impact of competition for summer forage by limiting time spent on the summer range (Schaefer & Mahoney 2013). That arrival was late for high NDVI in June even at low population size, suggests that NDVI might not indicate an effect of resources on arrival date. Individuals arrived on calving ground before the onset of vegetation growth (Bergerud et al. 2008) that is linked to snowmelt (Høye et al. 2007). Thus, high NDVI in June may have reflected earlier spring conditions, with high temperature and an early snowmelt (Taillon et al. 2013) impeding and slowing down migratory movements. In fall, the interaction between NDVI and population size seemed to indicate that competition may also delay the build up of reserves necessary to migrate, but if resources are too scarce, condition could deteriorate faster and individuals could be forced to migrate prematurely to escape competition (Nelson 1995, Schaefer & Mahoney 2013). Finally, competition for resources on the winter range, due to high population size, delayed arrival dates. Caribou from RFH and RGH showed variability in their use of winter ranges (Schaefer et al. 2000), and in a context of low resource availability, they may pursue their migration until they reach a suitable winter range. However, to test a real effect of competition, we need better information on resource abundance, notably in fall and winter when caribou essentially rely on lichen (Bergerud et al. 2008), as NDVI mostly reflects vascular plant productivity.

#### *Effect of global climate*

Global climate indices such as NAO are known to affect long-distance migrant species (Vähätalo et al. 2004). We detected an effect on the arrival date in spring of the NAO of May and of the NAO of November and December for the arrival date in fall. NAO in May was negatively related to temperature while NAO in November was negatively related to temperature and precipitation. Thus, effects of NAO appeared in contradiction with the effect of local weather variables encountered by caribou during their spring and

fall migrations. NAO, however, provides composite information about climate conditions prevailing in the whole range of caribou, early arrival in spring could thus be a response to broad-scale early spring conditions and late arrival in fall could be a response to broad-scale delay in the onset of winter. However, at a finer scale, individuals seemed to adjust their migration according to local conditions encountered during the migration (Gordo 2007, Tøttrup et al. 2008).

## **Conclusion**

We provide new insights on the influence of local weather on the timing of the spring caribou migration. Our study is also the 1<sup>st</sup> to highlight effects of weather on the fall migration of caribou. According to actual observations of climate and climate projections, temperature and precipitation are expected to increase in spring and fall in the forthcoming decades (IPCC 2014). Interpreting our findings in this context of climate change, we expect a more limited impact of climate change during fall than spring because of the variations in the use of winter ranges by caribou (Schaefer et al. 2000, Couturier et al. 2009b). Moreover, in contrast to spring migration that just precedes calving, a critical biological period for female caribou, fall migration does not impose such a strong constraint. However, individuals remain exposed to different weather events that may delay freeze-up and, then, increase the risk of injuries and drowning when crossing lakes on a thin ice layer (Miller & Gunn 1986). Early spring conditions appeared to slow down the migration, despite a clear trend for individuals to leave winter ranges earlier, migration distance and arrival date on calving ground did not change. In Greenland, females calved gradually earlier in response to the earlier onset of vegetation but change in the timing of calving occurred at a slower pace than change in the onset of vegetation growth (Post & Forchhammer 2008). Thus, the capacity of caribou to maintain synchrony with the vegetation growth onset could be limited by weather conditions encountered during migration. This synchrony is crucial for the survival of newborn calves (Post & Forchhammer 2008), which is a critical component of the population dynamics of ungulates (Gaillard et al. 2000). A mismatch between the date of arrival on calving grounds and vegetation green-up could be the most proximate negative impact of climate change for

migratory caribou. Further investigations are now required to assess how changes in the timing of the spring and fall migrations affect the fitness of migratory caribou.

## **Acknowledgements**

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## **CHAPITRE 4**

**Where to spend the winter? The role of intraspecific competition and climate in determining the selection of wintering areas by migratory caribou.**

## Résumé

La migration est une stratégie de sélection de l'habitat à large échelle qui permet aux animaux de suivre les changements dans l'abondance et la disponibilité des ressources. Habituellement décrits comme des déplacements hautement prédictibles, les mouvements migratoires peuvent être plus variables qu'attendu. La destination de la migration peut être affectée par les conditions climatiques et environnementales rencontrées pendant la migration ou sur l'aire d'arrivée. La compétition ou l'exploitation passée peut également pousser les individus à migrer vers différentes aires d'hivernage. Dans le Nord-du-Québec et au Labrador, Canada, les patrons de migrations d'automne des caribous des troupeaux Rivière-George (TRG) et Rivière-aux-Feuilles (TRF) ont grandement varié au cours des dernières décennies, les individus pouvant migrer vers 4 aires d'hivernage différentes. Durant cette même période, les deux troupeaux ont montré de grandes fluctuations dans leur abondance. Nous avons déterminé l'effet des facteurs environnementaux et des changements dans la taille de population sur les patrons de migration d'automne. Nous avons utilisé une analyse par forêts aléatoires sur la destination de 356 et 269 migrations d'automne, respectivement pour le TRG et le TRF, afin de déterminer comment le climat, les ressources et la taille de population affectent la décision des individus de migrer vers les différentes aires d'hivernage. Le principal déterminant pour le choix de l'aire d'hivernage était les tailles de population pour les deux troupeaux, suggérant une compétition intra- et inter-troupeau pour les aires d'hivernage. Les migrations du TRG vers les aires les plus éloignées, utilisées également par le TRF, dans la partie ouest de l'aire d'étude, étaient favorisées lorsque le TRG était abondant. Elles étaient également favorisées lorsque les ressources au départ, en octobre, étaient faibles. Les migrations du TRF vers l'aire du sud-ouest ont augmenté à mesure que le TRG déclinait, possiblement car la présence du TRG sur cette aire en réduisait l'accès pour les caribous du TRF. La conservation des espèces migratrices est un défi quand les populations ne montrent pas une forte fidélité à leurs aires saisonnières ou à leurs routes de migration. Comprendre comment les patrons de migration varient est essentiel pour la conservation des habitats et notre étude aide à déterminer quels facteurs affectent la migration d'une grande espèce arctique.

## Abstract

Migration is a large-scale habitat selection strategy allowing animals to follow broad-scale changes in resource abundance and availability. Usually depicted as highly predictable displacements, migratory movements can be more variable than expected. Destination of the migration may be affected by climatic and environmental conditions encountered during migration or at the arrival site. Competition or past exploitation may also induce individuals to migrate toward a different seasonal range. In Northern-Québec and Labrador, Canada, fall migration patterns of the caribou from the Rivière-George (RGH) and Rivière-aux-Feuilles (RFH) herds have varied greatly during the last decades, and individuals migrated toward four different winter ranges. During the same period, both herds have shown large fluctuations in abundance. We assessed the effect of environmental factors and changes in population size on the fall migration patterns. We used a random forests analysis on the destination of 356 and 296 fall migrations, respectively for RGH and RFH, to assess how climate, resources and population size affected the decision of individuals to migrate toward the different winter ranges. The main determinant of the choice of a winter range was population size for both herds, suggesting intra and inter-herd competition for winter ranges. Migrations of RGH toward the farthest ranges also used by RFH, on the western part of the study area, were favoured when the herd was abundant. They also occurred more frequently when resources were low at the departure, in October. Migrations of RFH toward the southwestern winter range increased as RGH declined, possibly because the presence of RGH on this range reduced access by caribou from RFH. Conservation of migrant species is challenging when populations do not show strong fidelity to their ranges or migration routes. Understanding variations in migration patterns is essential for the conservation of habitats and our study helped to assess which factors affect the migration of a large Arctic species.

## Introduction

Migration is one of the most spectacular large-scale phenomena in animal ecology. By using different seasonal ranges, migratory species can track changes in resources availability and abundance (Fryxell & Sinclair 1988, Bischof et al. 2012) or reduce the impact of predation and parasitism during critical periods (Piersma 1997, McKinnon et al. 2010). Usually viewed as a predictable displacement between a specific breeding area and a specific non-breeding area (Newton 2012), migratory movements can nevertheless show interannual or interindividual variations in terms of direction and distance travelled (Berthold et al. 2004, Bauer et al. 2010). Such variability in migration routes and destinations from one year to another makes the conservation of highly mobile species highly challenging (Singh & Milner-Gulland 2011, Runge et al. 2014). Thus, it is crucial to identify which factors influence decisions taken by individuals during their migration, particularly in the context of large-scale climate change affecting the environment of several migratory species (Harris et al. 2009, Both et al. 2010).

Although migration can be driven by endogenous factors, variability in the timing or patterns of migration appears to depend more on extrinsic factors (Ramenofsky et al. 2012). Direction and destination of the migration can be influenced by environmental conditions encountered during the migration or locally at the departing and arrival sites. The trajectory followed by migrants may reflect spatial patterns of emergence of resources such as seed crops (Newton 2012) or rainfall events determining food pulses (Morrison & Bolger 2012). Environmental conditions encountered during migration can also affect the body condition of migrants, and poor body condition, due to adverse weather conditions encountered during migration (Gordo 2007, Robinson et al. 2009) or resource shortage on staging areas (Bauer et al. 2010) for example, could prevent individuals from reaching the furthest destination ranges (Bauer et al. 2010). Body condition of migrants at the beginning of the migration can also influence migration tactics and individuals in good body condition could undertake longer migrations than individuals in poor condition (Bauer et al. 2010, Bogdanova et al. 2011, Müller et al. 2014). For example, this is one of the hypotheses put forward to explain the use of further winter ranges by unsuccessful breeding kittiwakes, *Rissa Tridactyla*, that expended less in parental care and were thus of higher body condition

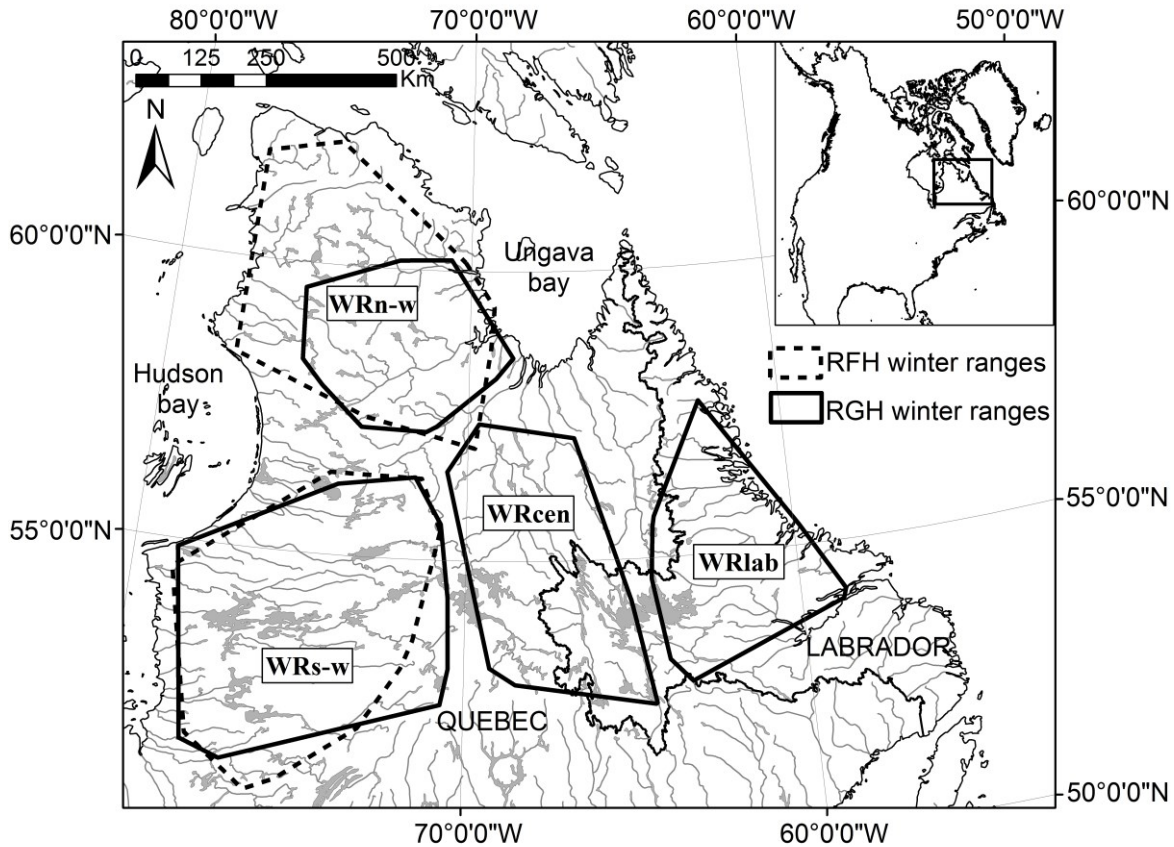
(Bogdanova et al. 2011). In fall, unfavourable conditions on the arrival site could also induce a shift in the location of the winter range. In Kazakhstan, the saiga antelope, *Saiga tatarica tatarica*, uses different winter ranges according to the harshness of winter conditions (Bekenov et al. 1998). In the high Arctic, a shift in winter ranges used by caribou, *Rangifer tarandus*, has been observed possibly in response to resource depletion (Ferguson & Messier 2000).

Density-dependence could also affect migration patterns, and range expansion should follow population size increases (Gaston et al. 2000). For migratory species, individuals may be forced to use further ranges when resources available on the seasonal range cannot sustain the whole population (Alonso et al. 1994). Presence of competitors on the arrival range, however, may shape the distribution of individuals or species arriving later (Gotelli et al. 2010). For example, in leap-frog migration, individuals from the furthest winter range may migrate to the furthest breeding range because individuals from the closest winter range reach the closest breeding range sooner (Holmgren & Lundberg 1993). Increasing intra or interspecific competition in a given area may force the less competitive or less abundant population to shift to another range (Flint et al. 2008, Williams et al. 2008).

In northern environments, migratory caribou are long-distance migrant ungulates that undertake a migration from the boreal forest, in early spring, to reach calving grounds located in the tundra at higher latitudes (Taillon et al. 2012b). Migratory caribou return each year to their traditional calving grounds although the location of calving grounds may change over the long term (Gunn et al. 2008, Taillon et al. 2012b). In some herds, the location of areas used during winter appears more variable than for the summer (McNeil et al. 2005, Person et al. 2007). Individuals of the same herd can spread over disjoint winter areas (e.g. Ferguson & Messier 2000, McNeil et al. 2005, Person et al. 2007) and may show less fidelity to winter than to summer range (Schaefer et al. 2000). Thus, the decision to migrate toward a given winter range may reflect environmental conditions expected on the winter range, such as resource depletion (Ferguson & Messier 2000).

Most caribou herds throughout their circumpolar distribution are declining (Vors & Boyce 2009) and face changes of their habitat due to climate changes and human development (Festa-Bianchet et al. 2011). Highly mobile species such as caribou can be particularly difficult to protect, especially when seasonal ranges and migration routes are not stable (Wilcove & Wikelski 2008, Runge et al. 2014). Then, variation in seasonal ranges use should be taken into account for conservation and land development planning and the first step is to identify the drivers of these variations. During the last three decades, migratory caribou from the Rivière-George herd (RGH) and the Rivière-aux-Feuilles herd (RFH) in northern Quebec and Labrador, Canada, have shown large variations in their winter distribution. RGH, notably, wintered over a vast region in the 1990s ranging from Labrador to Hudson Bay, and sometimes overlapping with RFH (Figure 4.1, Schmelzer & Otto 2003). Since the late 2000's, the annual distribution of the RGH has been limited to the eastern part of their original range and the winter ranges of the two herds do not overlap anymore (Taillon et al. 2012, Le Corre et al. *unpublished data*, Chap. 3). Here, our main objective was to identify the drivers of variations in the selection of winter ranges by a long-distance migratory ungulate. More specifically, we aimed to determine the changes in the use of the different winter ranges for the two migratory caribou herds in Quebec and Labrador, and to identify the factors influencing these changes. We investigated the influence of precipitation, snow abundance, temperature, broad-scale climatic variations (e.g., North Atlantic Oscillation index), food availability and inter-herd competition, on the fall migration patterns and resulting selection of winter ranges. We hypothesized that the use of the furthest winter ranges would increase in response to an increase in population size to limit intra-specific competition on the winter ranges close to the calving grounds. However, we expected that adverse weather conditions at the time of departure or poor individual body condition due to scarce resources during summer would limit the capacity of individuals to reach these furthest winter ranges. We considered climatic conditions before migration, in September and October, because conditions on the departing range could be used as a clue of the conditions to be expected during migration (Le Corre et al. *unpublished data*, Chap. 3). We assessed food availability during the summer because it can influence body condition in the fall (Couturier et al. 2009a), but also in September and

October because increased availability of resources on the summer range can affect departure time (Gordo 2007, Le Corre et al. *unpublished data*, Chap. 3).



**Figure 4.1.** Winter ranges of the Rivière-George (RGH, solid line) and Rivière-aux-Feuilles (RFH, dashed line) migratory caribou herds, located in northern Québec and Labrador, Canada. We delineated winter ranges using 100% Maximum Convex Polygons of the centroids of individual winter locations of 164 females for RGH and 128 females for RFH.

## Methods

### *Study area and caribou herds*

RGH and RFH range about 1 000 000 km<sup>2</sup> in northern Québec and Labrador (Figure 4.1). The wintering areas of the two herds may overlap in certain years, but the calving grounds are located ca. 800 km apart (57°N, 65°W for RGH; 58°N, 73°W for RFH; Boulet et al. 2007, Taillon et al. 2012b). Females leave their winter range mostly in April to reach calving grounds located in the tundra in late May, several hundred kilometers further north.

After calving, females move toward their summer ranges in early July (Taillon et al. 2012b). The migration toward wintering areas occurs usually between October and December (Le Corre et al. *unpublished data*, Chap. 3).

#### *Animal capture and tracking data*

We used the locations of 162 females for RGH and 124 females for RFH equipped with ARGOS satellite-tracking collars (Telonics, ARGOS platform, Mesa, Arizona, USA) between fall 1991 and fall 2011 (female/year RGH:  $17 \pm 4$  standard deviation SD; female/year RFH:  $15 \pm 10$  SD). We captured most females in the winter range and yearlings on the calving ground, using a net-gun fired from a helicopter (Bookhout 1996). We followed the guidelines from the Canadian Council on Animal Care during handling. We considered individuals to be independent because capture sites within a given year were spread over several thousands km<sup>2</sup>. We monitored females on average for  $2.1 \text{ years} \pm 2.0$  (SD) with some individuals followed for up to 10 years. Location frequency ranged from one location every day (0.8% of the data base) to one every 7 days (0.9%), but most locations were collected every 5 days (68.1% of the database). We used a similar algorithm as Austin et al. (2003) to eliminate locations leading to movements higher than 50 kilometers per day (Boulet et al. 2007).

#### *Winter ranges*

We identified the different winter ranges used by RGH and RFH during the entire study period by grouping individuals according to the location of their winter range, regardless of the year during which it was used. During winter, movement rates are low in both herds until the spring migration departure (Le Corre et al. 2014). We used locations occurring during this period, referred as the "winter break" hereafter, to assess winter ranges. The methodological approach used to determine winter breaks is fully described in Le Corre et al. (2014). To summarize, we used first-passage time analysis (FPT, Fauchald & Tveraa 2003) to characterize movements of individuals along annual paths, using a segmentation process (Lavielle 2005) dividing the path in bouts with homogenous FPT values. We considered that the winter break started when FPT values suddenly increased in early winter and it ended when the FPT values suddenly declined in spring as caribou



departed for their migration toward calving areas (Le Corre et al. 2014). Overall, we determined winter ranges using 456 winter breaks for RGH and 356 winter breaks for RFH during the whole study period. We determined the centroid of locations during each winter break by averaging the coordinates of all locations recorded during that winter break. Then, we performed a hierarchical cluster analysis (*NbClust* package, Charrad et al. 2014, R software, R Core Team 2015) , for each herd, on the coordinates of the centroids to aggregate individuals that spent their winter break in the same area. We used the Ward method, which minimizes total within-cluster variance, to generate the clusters (Murtagh & Legendre 2014). The *NbClust* function provides the optimal number of clusters and the best partition of the dataset according to 30 different indices (for the complete list see Charrad et al. 2014). We considered that each cluster obtained using this approach represented a different winter range used by caribou. Then, we used these winter ranges, i.e. the cluster ID, as the dependent variable in the following classification analysis.

#### *Demographic data*

RGH and RFH experienced large variations in population size during the last few decades. In the 1950's, the size of RGH was estimated to be at least 60 000 individuals (Rasiulis 2015). RGH went up to 823 000 ( $\pm$  104 000, 90% confidence interval, CI) individuals in 1993, and decreased to 385 000 ( $\pm$  108 000) caribou in 2001 (Couturier et al. 2004), 27 600 ( $\pm$  2760) caribou in 2012 (Ministère des Forêts, de la Faune et des Parcs du Québec [MFFP], *unpublished data*), and 14 200 ( $\pm$  710) caribou in 2014 (MFFP, *unpublished data*). When RFH was identified in 1975 its size was estimated at 56 000 individuals (Le Hénaff 1976). The herd increased to ca. 628 000 caribou in 2001 (Couturier et al. 2004) then declined to 430 000 ( $\pm$  98 900) individuals in 2011 (MFFP, *unpublished data*). To test the effect of population size on winter range selection we computed annual population sizes by fitting a polynomial regression spline to the census estimates with the "loess" function in R software (R Core Team 2015). We included population estimates of both herds in the classification analysis for each herd.

### *Climate data*

We used data from the Canadian Regional Climate Model (CRCM, v4.3) produced by *Ouranos* (Music & Caya 2007, de Elía & Côté 2010) to describe local climate. The domain of the CRCM simulation is centred over the province of Québec (111×87 grid points, resolution of 45 km). Time series of atmospheric variables (e.g., atmospheric pressure, temperature, evaporation) taken from the global atmospheric reanalyses ERA-Interim that provide a numerical description of the climate since 1979 (Dee et al. 2011) are used to populate the CRCM simulation. We used the monthly average of the mean daily temperatures (°C), the monthly average of the daily precipitation (mm/day), and the monthly average of the snow water equivalent (mm) provided by the CRCM during our study period. We associated each caribou location to monthly climate data using the corresponding grid cell of the CRCM. Because caribou could use different cells within a given month, we computed average monthly values of climate variables by calculating the mean value of climate variables associated with all locations recorded during a given month. We included in the classification analysis local climate data of September and October, because individuals may use local conditions on the departure range as an indication of the forthcoming migration conditions (Le Corre et al. *unpublished data*, Chap. 3, Visser et al. 2010).

We used the North Atlantic Oscillation index (NAO) to describe climate at a large scale. The NAO is based on the difference in atmospheric pressure between subpolar and subtropical regions of the North Atlantic and it integrates precipitation and temperature data (Hurrell 1995). We used monthly NAO values as explanatory variables. To facilitate the interpretation of NAO effects, we related monthly NAO with global trends in temperature and precipitation throughout the study area (see Annexe 6). We used NAO of September and October in the classification analysis.

### *Plant productivity*

We used the Normalized Difference Vegetation Index (NDVI) to characterize plant productivity on RFH and RGH ranges. NDVI is representative of plant productivity and phenology in arctic habitats (Myneni et al. 1997) and can affect life-history traits in

ungulates (Couturier et al. 2009b). We used NDVI data from the Advanced Very High Resolution Radiometer satellite images (Time Series 1985-2011, 10-day image composites, resolution of 1 km) processed by the Canadian Centre for Remote Sensing (Latifovic et al. 2005). We calculated the mean NDVI value within a circle with a radius of 10 km centred on each location. We set the radius to the mean daily distance travelled by females outside the winter period ( $10.2 \text{ km/day} \pm 7.7 \text{ SD}$ ,  $n = 236$ ; Le Corre et al. 2014). We used the quality mask layer of the AVHRR image composites to identify pixels with a thick cloud shadow and excluded these pixels, as well as pixels of water to compute NDVI values. When clouds represented more than 50% of the buffer area, we removed the location. We computed average monthly NDVI values as described in the *climate data* section. We used NDVI of July and August because summer resources can be linked to body condition (Herfindal et al. 2006, Couturier et al. 2009a). We also used NDVI of September and October because a longer period of availability of food resources may affect the fall migration, notably the timing of departure (Gordo 2007).

#### *Random forest classification*

To assess which environmental variables affected the decision of caribou to migrate toward a given winter range, we used Random forests (Breiman 2001). Random forests (RF), a machine-learning algorithm, are based on classification and regression trees, and are increasingly used in ecology (Cutler et al. 2007). They provide a better accuracy in classification than other classification methods (Breiman 2001). RF do not require assumption on data distribution and are not subject to overfitting (Breiman 2001). RF grow many classification trees by bagging, i.e. each tree is grown on a training set corresponding to a bootstrap sample of the dataset (Breiman 1996). For each tree, the leftover of the dataset, called the out-of-bag sample (OOB), is used as an internal cross-validation. Growing the tree, binary splits at each node are made using a small number of predictors randomly selected among the whole set of predictors. The tree obtained is applied to the OOB to predict the classes of the OOB observations. Finally, the predicted class of an observation in the original dataset is the class that received the majority of votes when aggregating the predictions of all trees. The accuracy of the RF model is given by the percentage of misclassifications over all the OOB samples (OOB error rate).

We built RF for each herd. We used the winter range ID as the dependent variable and a set of 14 variables as predictors: temperature, precipitation and snow water equivalent of September and October, NAO of September and October, NDVI of July, August, September and October, and population sizes of RFH and RGH. We used the *randomForest* package in R (Liaw & Wiener 2002) to perform RF. The datasets for RGH and RFH included respectively 356 and 296 individuals-year; see above). For both herds, a winter range received disproportionately higher use compared to the others, leading to a high prediction accuracy for the main class and a poor prediction accuracy for the others. To solve this problem, we built RF by subsampling the main class (Chen et al. 2004). Subsampling reduces the prediction accuracy of the main class and, to a lesser extent, the OOB error rate, but greatly improves the prediction accuracy of the other classes. Before to run RF models, we used the *rfImpute* function (*randomForest* package) to impute missing values in our datasets. RF can be used to impute missing values by computing the proximity between the observations, i.e. the proportion of time two observations are found in the same terminal node (Cutler et al. 2007). A first RF is performed with missing values replaced by the median value of the variable and proximities are computed. Then the missing values are replaced by the average value of the variable weighted by the proximities (Cutler et al. 2007). In *rfImpute* the process is iterated 5 times by default. For the imputation, we set the number of trees to be grown to 3000 and the number of variables to be sampled at each node to 4, following Breiman (2001) who suggested using the squared root of the total number of variables. We set the size of the bootstrap sample to draw in each class to the size of the smallest class. Then we performed the final RF on the imputed dataset for each herd using the same RF parameters than for imputation.

An interesting feature of the RF is the measure of importance of the variable involved in the classification (Breiman 2001). The importance of a given predictor can be assessed by the mean decrease in accuracy of the RF when the values of this predictor are randomly permuted within the OOB, breaking the association between the predictor and the response variable. The stronger the association, the more the prediction accuracy obtained using the altered OOB should decrease. The decrease in accuracy is then averaged over all trees as a measure of the variable importance. To obtain a relative index of each variable's

importance, we assigned a value of 100 to the most important variable and we scaled the other variables accordingly (Friedman 2001). Due to the stochastic aspect of the RF algorithm, we observed slight variations in variable importance, and consequently in the ranking of the variables based on their importance, from one run to another. Thus, we ran each RF 100 times and used the mean of variable importance over the 100 runs (*e.g.* Carrasco et al. 2014).

Finally, to interpret the effect of the most important variables on the classification, we used partial dependence plots (Friedman 2001, Hastie et al. 2001). Partial dependence plots are useful tools to visualize the relationship between the predictors and the response variable for "blackbox" machine-learning methods such as RF or boosted trees (Cutler et al. 2007). Details about partial dependence functions are provided in Hastie et al. (2001). For a RF with multiple classes, partial dependence plots depict how the log-odds of observing a given class depend on the variable of interest. We used the *partialPlot* function of the *randomForest* package to create the partial dependence plots.

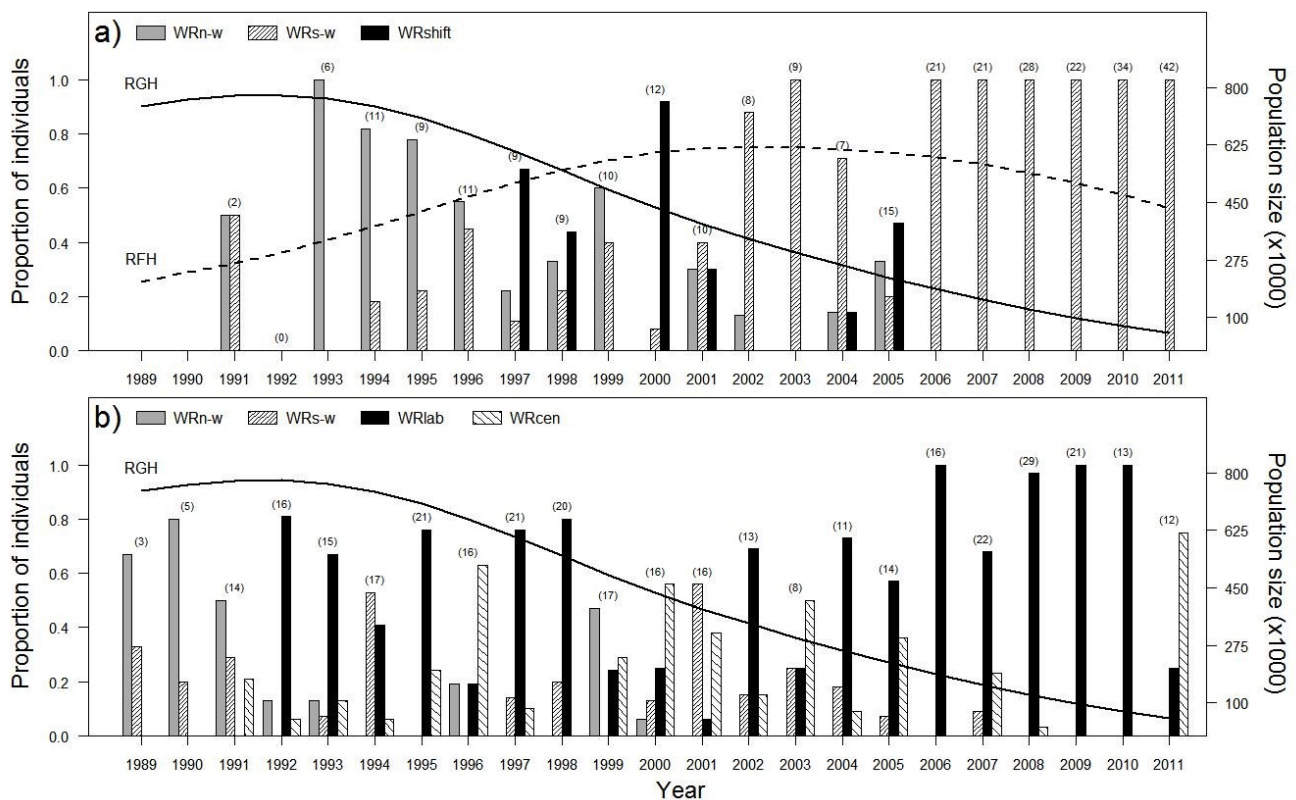
## **Results**

### *Winter range use*

We identified four different winter ranges used by caribou of the RGH between 1989 and 2011 (Figure 4.1): a north-western winter range (WRn-w), a south-western winter range (WRs-w), a central winter range (WRcen) and a winter range in Labrador (WRlab). We identified two winter ranges that caribou from RFH shared with caribou from RGH (Figure 4.1): WRn-w and WRs-w. A third category of winter range use was observed for RFH caribou with individuals shifting from WRs-w to WRn-w in the middle of the winter (late January - early February). We created a third class (WRshift) for the RFH caribou to account for this specific behaviour. Individuals within a herd can be spread in different winter ranges during the same year (Figure 4.2), and among the 156 females followed over several winter seasons 82 (53 %) used different winter ranges from one year to another.

Among the 296 observations used for RFH in RF analysis, 214 observations occurred in WRs-w, 50 in WRn-w and 32 in WRshift. Caribou from RFH used WRn-w

mostly in the 1990's, but the use of this winter range gradually declined and it was no longer used from 2006 on (Figure 4.2a). Conversely, caribou from RFH increasingly used WRs-w that became the main winter range in the 2000's and the only winter range used from 2006 onward. WRshift was mostly observed between 1997 and 2005, during the transition period where the main winter range changed from WRn-w to WRs-w. For RGH, among the 356 observations used in the RF analysis, 213 occurred in WRlab, 71 in WRcen, 43 in WRs-w and 29 in WRn-w. Patterns of winter range use were less clear for RGH than RFH, and WRlab appeared to be the main winter range during the whole study period (Figure 4.2b). However, while caribou from RGH used the four winter ranges in the 1990's, the use of WRn-w and WRs-w declined at the beginning of the 2000's, and fall migrations toward the western winter ranges were no longer observed after 2007.



**Figure 4.2.** Proportion of individuals migrating toward the different winter ranges for a) the Rivière-aux-Feuilles (RFH) and b) the Rivière-George (RGH) migratory caribou herds with population size estimates of RFH (dashed line) and RGH (solid line). Numbers within brackets indicate sample size. WRshift refer to individuals that migrated toward WRs-w but only stayed few weeks on the winter range then shifted to WRn-w in the middle of winter.

### *RF accuracy and variable importance*

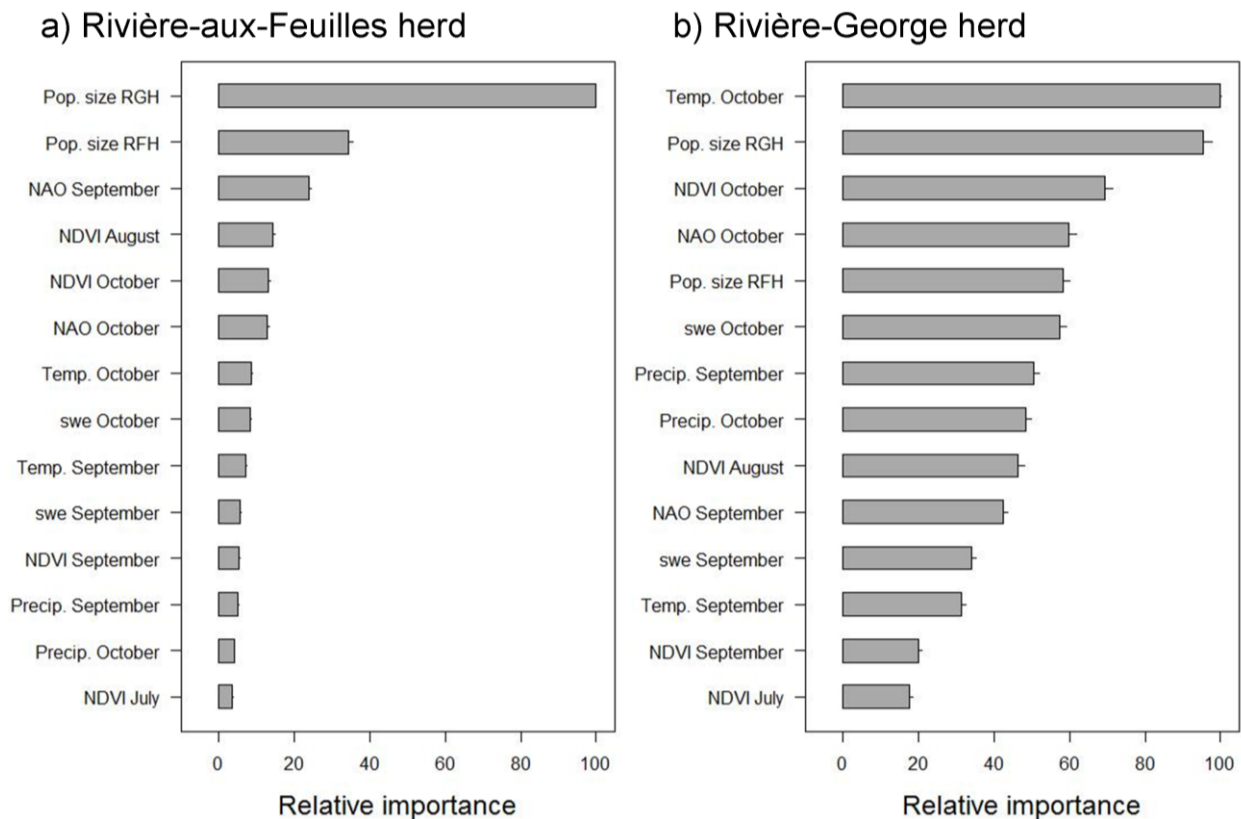
RFs for RFH performed relatively well with a mean OOB error rate over the 100 runs of  $16.4\% \pm 0.3\%$  (standard deviation). OOB error rate of the most accurate RF was 15.8% with a misclassification rate of 24.0% for WRn-w, 14.4% for WRs-w and 12.5% for WRshift. RFs for RGH were less accurate with a mean OOB error rate of  $31.3\% \pm 0.5\%$ . The most accurate RF for RGH had an OOB error rate of 30.1% with a misclassification rate of 6.9% for WRn-w, 41.9% for WRs-w, 23.0% for WRlab and 53.5% for WRcen.

Based on each variable's importance index (Figure 4.3a), the most influential variables for the RFH classification was population size of the RGH herd, followed by population size of the RFH, and the NAO of September. For RGH, most influential variables for the classification were the temperatures of October, population size of RGH and NDVI of October (Figure 4.3b). Overall, for both herds, local weather appeared less influential than weather at a larger scale, and conditions at the time of departure in October appeared more influential than conditions in September.

### *Partial dependence*

We investigated partial dependence of the 3 most important variables for the RF classification, i.e. the odds of observing caribou migrating toward WRn-w, WRs-w and WRshift for RFH, and WRn-w, WRs-w, WRcen and WRlab for RGH. For RFH, the odds of observing individuals on WRs-w declined sharply when RGH population increased above ca. 200 000 individuals (Figure 4.4d). Inversely, the odds of observing WRn-w or WRshift sharply increased at 200 000 individuals (Figure 4.4a.b). Odds to observe migration toward WRn-w continued to increase as the population size augmented (Figure 4.4a), whereas the odds to observe winter range shift dropped slightly when RGH population reached its highest level (Figure 4.4g). The second most important variable for the classification of the migration of RFH was the RFH population size. Odds of observing WRshift increased as RFH population size increased (Figure 4.4h). Inversely, odds of observing WRn-w declined as the population increased with a drop when population reached ca. 425 000 individuals (Figure 4.4b). The effect of RFH population size on the

odds to observe migration toward WRs-w was less marked with a small increased when population reached ca. 425,000 individuals, followed up by a slight decline as the RFH population increased (Figure 4.4e). Finally partial dependence plots for the effect of NAO of September on the odds to observe the three different migration patterns indicate that for positive values of NAO in September, odds of observing WRn-w decreased (Figure 4.4c) whereas odds of observing WRshift abruptly increased (Figure 4.4i). Odds of observing migration toward WRs-w slightly increased as NAO in September increased (Figure 4.4f). NAO in September was negatively related with monthly mean temperature (linear mixed-model:  $\beta = -0.05 \pm 0.02$ , CI 95%: [-0.10:-0.01], Annexe 6).



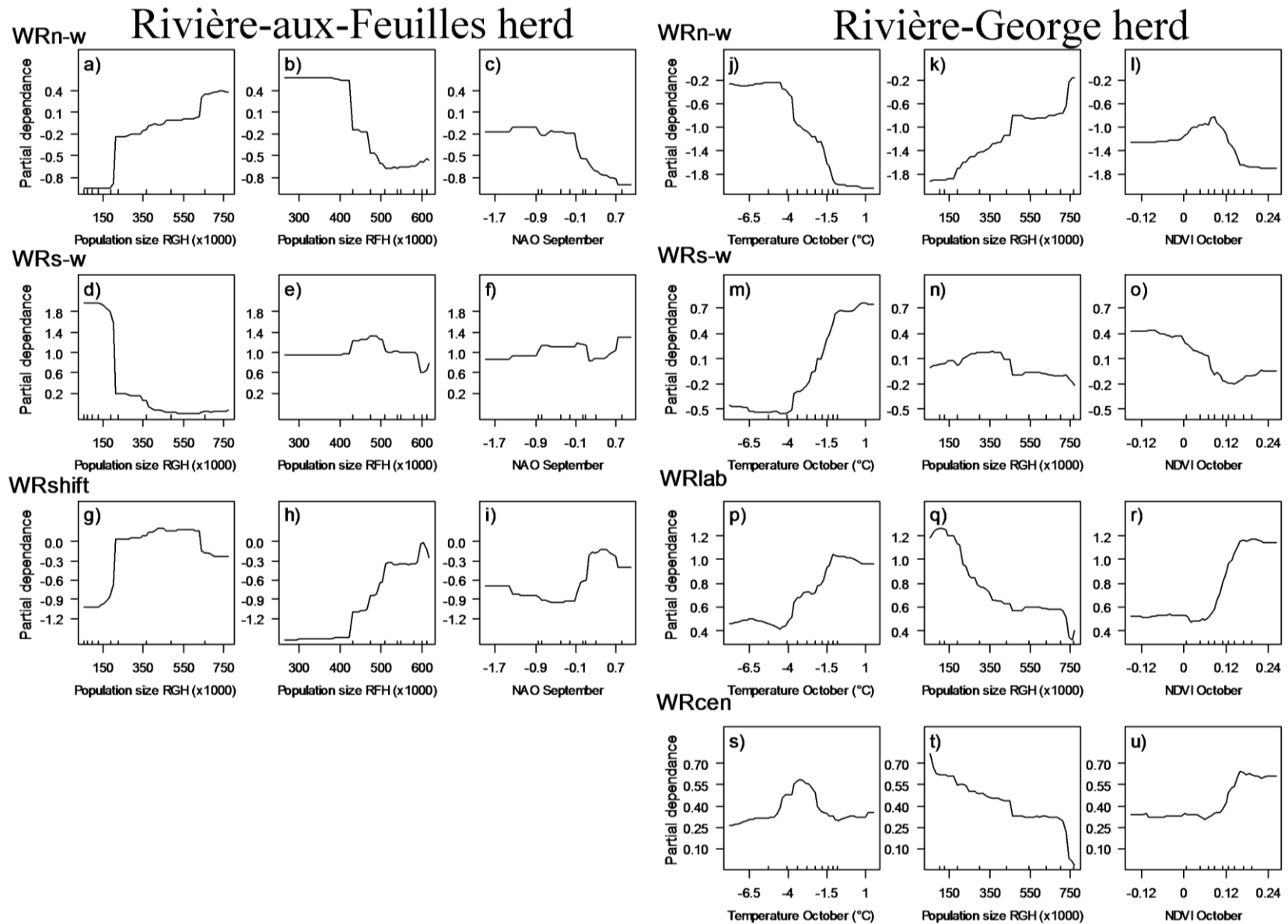
**Figure 4.3.** Relative importance of the variables assessed by the random forest classification (RF) to explain the choice of a winter range for a) the Rivière-aux-Feuilles migratory caribou herd, and b) the Rivière-George herd. The mean importance of the variables over the 100 runs of the RF is presented with its standard error. Abbreviations: Precip: precipitation; Temp: temperature; swe: snow water equivalent; Pop. size: population size.



For RGH, the most important variable was the temperature in October. Odds to observe migration toward the northern winter range, WRn-w, declined as temperature increased (Figure 4.4j). In contrast, odds of observing migration toward the southern winter ranges, WRs-w and WRlab, increased as the RGH population increased (Figure 4.4m,p). The odds of observing use of WRcen was highest when temperatures in October were intermediate (Figure 4.4t). Effect of the RGH population size affected the odds to observe migration toward the western and eastern winter ranges. Odds of observing use of the eastern winter ranges, WRlab and WRcen, decreased with the increase in population size (Figure 4.4q,t). In contrast, odds of observing migration toward WRn-w increased as RGH population size increased (Figure 4.4k). We observed a slight increase in the odds of observing migrations toward WRs-w as RGH population increased but it dropped when population size reached ca. 400,000 individuals (Figure 4.4n). NDVI in October seemed also to discriminate the migrations toward the western winter ranges from the migrations toward the eastern winter ranges. Odds of observing migration towards the eastern ranges, WRlab and WRcen, increased as NDVI in October increased (Figure 4.4r,u). In contrast, odds of migrating toward WRs-w decreased as NDVI increased (Figure 4.4o). Odds of observing migration toward WRn-w started to increase with NDVI, but rapidly declined once NDVI reached a value of ca. 1 (Figure 4.4l).

## **Discussion**

In northern Québec and Labrador, despite the location of migratory caribou calving grounds has gradually shifted during the last decades (Taillon et al. 2012b), caribou from RFH and RGH migrated each spring toward the same region of their annual range to calve and reach more productive summer ranges. The destination of the fall migration, however, appeared to vary among years as individuals may spend the winter several hundred kilometres apart in consecutive years. For both herds, the decision of individuals to migrate toward different winter ranges in a given year was mostly influenced by population size during that year. The selection of a winter range was also influenced by local climate in October for RGH, while it depended more on the index of broad-scale climate conditions in September for RFH.



**Figure 4.4.** Partial-dependence plots for the 3 most important variables according to the random forest classification for each winter range location for the Rivière-aux-Feuilles herd (a-i) and the Rivière-George herd (j-u). Variables are presented from left panels to right panels in decreasing order of importance for each winter range location. Hash marks on the x-axes indicate the deciles of the variable distribution. WRshift refer to individuals that migrated toward WRs-w but only stayed few weeks on the winter range then shifted to WRn-w in the middle of winter.

### *Competition for the winter ranges*

Although the effect of density-dependence on migration of ungulates has recently received attention (*e.g.* Mysterud et al. 2011, Schaefer & Mahoney 2013), little is known about the potential impact of intra-specific competition at the individual level but also among adjacent populations of the same species with overlapping distribution range. At higher population size, caribou from RGH were more prone to expand toward the western winter ranges. The use of the farthest winter ranges could be a response to increased competition due to high population size and to the resource depletion of the winter ranges closest to the calving grounds. Skooge (1968) defined the centre of habitation of a caribou herd as the area including optimum habitats for the herd and that individuals occupy at low population size. As caribou population reach a given density threshold, individuals start to increase their displacements and to move outside the centre of habitation. The centre of habitation of the RGH was assessed as the area occupied by RGH in the 1950's, when the herd counted < 60,000 individuals, and covered an area equivalent to the actual annual distribution of RGH (see Bergerud et al. 2008, Fig. 12.1). As the herd increased, caribou started to leave the centre of habitation in fall and winter, winter ranges drifting gradually to the west (Bergerud et al. 2008). RGH then extended its winter distribution, as individuals were apparently avoiding winter areas that were used in previous years (Schmelzer & Otto 2003). Such seasonal range drift has also been observed in other long-distance migrant ungulates in response to reduced availability of winter resources, although it was more related to peculiar environmental conditions than to over-exploitation of resources due to an increasing population size (Bekenov et al. 1998, Ito et al. 2006).

Caribou from RFH appeared to experience inter- and within-herd competition. The presence of caribou from RGH on the western winter ranges seemed to limit access to the southern winter range for RFH and the odds of observing caribou from RFH migrating southward increased as RGH population declined. The regional distribution of migratory species on seasonal ranges can be locally driven by inter-specific competition (Gotelli et al. 2010) and increased inter-specific competition can force a less competitive or less abundant species to shift to another seasonal range (Flint et al. 2008). Although less often reported, intra-specific competition between populations of a migratory species can lead to similar

results. For example, Black-browed albatrosses, *Thalassarche melanophrys*, from the South-Georgia population avoided the nearby summering range used by the larger Falkland Islands population (Phillips et al. 2005). In California, two populations of lesser snow geese, *Chen caerulescens caerulescens*, shared the same wintering area, and the number of migrants from the first population declined as the number of migrants from the second population increased (Williams et al. 2008). In our study, the proportion of individuals from RFH migrating toward the southern winter range increased as RFH progressively outnumbered RGH (Figure 4.2a), suggesting that the increased presence of RGH may have prevented the access of WRs-w to individuals from RFH in the 1990's. Individuals from RFH could also expand their range in winter toward WRs-w in response to the increase in population size, despite a shift to the northern range in the middle of winter was favoured when RFH population size was high. Interestingly, this shift was also more frequent when RGH population size was intermediate. At high density, migrants would reduce competition by leaving seasonal ranges early (Myysterud et al. 2011). Caribou from the Buchan Plateau herd in Newfoundland, Canada, spent less time on their summer ranges as the population increased (Schaefer & Mahoney 2013). In white tailed-deer *Odocoileus virginianus*, individuals left their overcrowded winter ranges as soon as snow conditions allowed departure (Nelson 1995). Thus, winter range shifts observed in RFH when RFH and RGH populations were high could be a response to increased competition on the southern winter range, individuals leaving several weeks earlier than during the normal spring migration in April (Le Corre et al. *unpublished data*, Chap. 3).

The decision to migrate toward the northern or the southern winter range by caribou from RFH could have been taken at the beginning of the migration because the two herds partially overlapped during the rutting period when RGH population was high (Boulet et al. 2007). Competition experienced during the rutting period by caribou from RFH could be used as a clue for the expected competition on the winter range. Fewer individuals migrated in red deer, *Cervus elaphus*, at high population density (Myysterud et al. 2011) when the opportunity for young individuals to find adequate summer ranges was limited by the presence of older individuals. Red deer, however, differ from caribou because they show high fidelity to their seasonal ranges with partially exclusive home ranges (Myysterud et al.

2011). We cannot also exclude that past competition experienced on a given winter range may influence the choice for caribou from RFH to return to this range the following year, such as caribou from RGH avoiding previously used winter ranges (Schmelzer & Otto 2003).

#### *Food availability and climate*

We expected that abundant food during summer and in the fall before the migration would allow individuals to migrate further because of higher body condition (Couturier et al. 2009a). However, contrary to our prediction, caribou from RGH migrated toward the furthest winter ranges, WRn-w and WRs-w, when NDVI in October was low. Caribou mostly rely on lichens rather than vascular plants in winter (Couturier et al. 2009a), thus NDVI might not really reflect food availability during this period but low NDVI values may indicate the presence of snow that could reduce access to resources. Longest migrations in ungulates occur in the less productive habitats (Teitelbaum et al. 2015). Thus, the use of the furthest winter ranges by caribou from RGH could be a response to decreased resource availability.

Climate appeared to impact the selection of winter ranges for caribou from RFH and RGH differently. The destination of the fall migration for caribou of the RGH depended on local weather conditions at the time of departure, while the effect of NAO for RFH suggested that the destination of the herd depended more on regional conditions. Migration of RGH toward the northern and central winter ranges was favoured by low October temperatures, whereas mild temperatures favoured migration toward the southern winter ranges. Although caribou can swim across lakes or rivers, ice-free or partially frozen water bodies are potential barriers to caribou movements during migration (Poole et al. 2010, Leblond et al. 2016). Thus, early freeze-up could facilitate migration toward the northern ranges where temperatures are colder and lakes and rivers are already frozen (Poole et al. 2010). On the other hand, caribou might prefer to migrate toward southern ranges during late freeze-up, crossing ice-free lakes rather than freezing lakes and rivers as the risks of injuries and drowning may increase by crossing and breaking through new ice (Miller and Gunn 1986, Poole et al. 2010). We observed a different effect for RFH with migration

toward the southern range favoured when NAO values were positive in September. Broad-scale climate indices are known to influence long-distance migration (Vähätalo et al. 2004). NAO provides information about broad-scale climate that affect the whole range of caribou. Negative values of NAO in September could indicate the persistence of summer conditions. Several bird species remain on their summer range as long as conditions (e.g. resources, local weather) remain favourable (Jenni et al. 2003, Gordo 2007). An extension of summer conditions may have enticed individuals to stay north rather than moving south. However, despite a clear negative relationship between NAO and temperature and precipitations in winter (Couturier et al 2009a), during the rest of the year the relationship between NAO and local weather conditions is less strong and more variable (Coulibaly 2006). Thus, interpretation of the effect of NAO of September should be taken with caution.

The RF approach we used is increasingly popular in ecology (Cutler et al. 2007). It is a particularly powerful classification tool generally providing more accurate results than conventional classification methods (Cutler et al. 2007). Here, classification accuracy, based on the misclassification rates, was relatively good for RFH but a bit weaker for RGH. Based on individual centroids of winter locations, we considered winter ranges as discrete and separated areas. However, they were probably connected by individuals wintering in between these ranges. Indeed, even if movement rates decrease in winter (Le Corre et al. 2014), caribou remain a mobile species and individuals may move between different winter ranges, their winter home range overlapping close winter ranges. This is notably true for caribou from RGH wintering in or close to WRcen, which could explain the lower accuracy of classifying individuals in WRcen, which is located directly in the neighbourhood of the three other winter ranges.

#### *Changes in winter range use and conservation*

Most caribou populations in Canada are currently declining (Festa-Bianchet et al. 2011). Recently, the question of demographic independence between RGH and RFH has been raised for the designation of management units for conservation (Yannic et al. 2016). Caribou from RGH and RFH do not differ genetically and the connectivity between the two

herds was maintained by the overlap occurring during the rutting period (Boulet et al. 2007). The use of the western winter ranges by RGH probably also helped maintaining this connectivity. Indeed, during the study period, 15 females shifted from RGH to RFH. These shifts occurred after caribou had wintered on the common south-western winter range: females followed the RFH migration to the RFH calving grounds and did not come back to the RGH calving ground the following years. However, the current recession of the RGH annual range and the abandonment of the western winter ranges could, on a very long term, lower the connectivity between the two herds.

A common view of caribou migration depicts a long migration during which the whole herd moves seasonally between tundra and taïga (Couturier et al. 2010, Festa-Bianchet et al. 2011). However, our results showed that migration in caribou was not a fixed behaviour and that individuals employed different migration tactics within the same herd or from one year to another. Migrations could be long as expected, but they can also be short when individuals decide to winter close to the calving ground. Conservation of migrant species is highly challenging when species do not show strong fidelity to their ranges or migration routes (Runge et al. 2014). In Northern Québec and Labrador, Taillon et al. (2012b) showed that management and land protection did not follow variations in calving ground locations for the RGH and RFH and recommended to redefine the protected areas regularly, on a 3-5 year basis. Such recommendation also applies to winter range protection as winter range use by RGH and RFH varied through time. Moreover, the use of multiple winter ranges implies that individuals used different migration routes to reach the different winter ranges. A major threat that face long-distant migrant ungulates is the disruption of the migration by human encroachment (Berger 2004, Sawyer et al. 2009). Consequences on migration patterns can range from a change in the migration route to avoid the perturbation (Mahoney & Schaefer 2002a) to a loss of the migration routes (Berger 2004, Ito et al. 2005). When perturbations are too extreme, populations can lose their migratory behaviour and become resident (Sawyer et al. 2013). Thus it is also crucial to take into account variability in migration routes due to the use of multiple winter ranges. Past migration patterns should not be excluded of conservation planning because potential

winter ranges and migration routes may be used again according to changes in environmental conditions and population size.

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# **CHAPITRE 5**

## **Discussion générale**

La migration est l'un des processus écologiques à large échelle les plus impressionnants. Elle permet aux individus de suivre les variations saisonnières de l'abondance des ressources ou de réduire le risque de prédation (Fryxell & Sinclair 1988, McKinnon et al. 2010). De nombreuses espèces ou populations migratrices sont par contre en déclin (Sanderson et al. 2006, Bolger et al. 2008), principalement en raison des changements climatiques (Robinson et al. 2009). L'effet des changements climatiques se traduit notamment par un changement dans la phénologie des processus écologiques (Parmesan & Yohe 2003), causant une désynchronisation des déplacements migratoires et des variations saisonnières des ressources (Parmesan & Yohe 2003, Møller et al. 2008), ou par une modification des conditions rencontrées lors de la migration. Ainsi, afin de déterminer l'impact des changements climatiques sur les populations migratrices, il est primordial d'identifier et de comprendre l'effet des variables environnementales sur la phénologie et les patrons de migration. Le caribou migrateur (*Rangifer tarandus*) n'échappe pas à ce déclin global (Vors & Boyce 2009). De part sa répartition circumpolaire, cette espèce doit faire face à des changements climatiques plus intenses qu'ailleurs sur la planète (IPCC 2014). Ma thèse s'intéresse à l'effet du climat, des ressources et de la compétition intra-spécifique sur les composantes temporelles et spatiales des migrations des caribous des troupeaux Rivière-George (TRG) et Rivière-aux-Feuilles (TRF), dans le Nord-du-Québec et au Labrador.

Avant d'étudier l'impact des variables environnementales sur la phénologie et les patrons de migration, il a été nécessaire, dans un premier temps, de clairement identifier les mouvements associés à la migration. J'ai proposé une approche objective, basée sur la détection de changements dans les patrons des déplacements saisonniers, pour identifier les départs et arrivées en migration au printemps (Chapitre 2) et à l'automne (Chapitre 3, Annexe 4). Une fois les dates de départ et d'arrivée des migrations déterminées, j'ai mis en évidence un effet des conditions climatiques rencontrées lors de la migration via un impact de la neige sur les conditions de déplacements, et sur la phénologie de la migration au printemps et à l'automne (Chapitre 3). J'ai finalement mis en évidence un effet de la compétition intra-spécifique sur les patrons de migration à l'automne : le choix de l'aire de

d'hivernage et la destination des migrations d'automne dépendant principalement de la compétition intra- et inter-troupeaux (Chapitre 4).

## **Identifier les départs et les arrivées en migration**

Lorsque les aires saisonnières sont stables et bien définies spatialement les dates de départ et d'arrivée en migration peuvent être facilement déterminées en utilisant les limites géographiques de ces aires (Mahoney & Schaefer 2002a). Cependant, la localisation des aires saisonnières peut varier d'une année à l'autre (Schaefer et al. 2000, Taillon et al. 2012b). Il convient alors de se baser sur d'autres critères, tels que les changements saisonniers dans la structure des déplacements, pour identifier les départs et les arrivées en migration. Le temps de premier-passage ou *first-passage time* (FPT, Fauchald & Tveraa 2003), principalement utilisé dans le cadre de l'étude du comportement de recherche alimentaire des individus (Bailey & Thompson 2006, Pinaud & Weimerskirch 2007, Byrne & Chamberlain 2012), permet de caractériser la structure des déplacements afin de distinguer les déplacements lents et sinueux, liés à la recherche alimentaire au sein de parcelles de ressources, et les déplacements inter-parcelles rapides (Frair et al. 2005, Le Corre et al. 2008). Une analogie peut être faite entre les mouvements à fine échelle, entre parcelles de ressources, et les mouvements migratoires, à très grande échelle, entre des aires saisonnières distinctes. De fait, le FPT a pu être appliqué aux déplacements saisonniers d'espèces telles que le béluga, *Delphinapterus leucas*, afin d'identifier les départs en migration (Bailleul et al. 2012). J'ai adapté l'approche développée par Barraquand & Benhamou (2008) en combinant le FPT et une méthode de segmentation statistique (Lavielle 2005) afin de proposer une méthode objective pour analyser et segmenter les déplacements saisonniers des caribous du TRG et du TRF. En détectant les changements dans la structure des déplacements liés à l'utilisation des aires saisonnières et à la migration, j'ai pu identifier les départs et arrivées en migration, au printemps (Chapitre 2) et à l'automne (Chapitre 3).

### *Trajets migratoires des caribous du TRG et du TRF*

La segmentation des trajets simulés a montré que l'approche utilisée est particulièrement efficace et précise. Une fois un trajet segmenté, il est alors possible

d'identifier les segments correspondants aux périodes biologiques d'intérêt. Au cours de l'année, les déplacements des caribous varient. Les taux de déplacement baissent notamment à moins de 5 km/jour tout au long de la période d'utilisation de l'aire d'hivernage (Couturier et al. 2010) et, sur une plus courte période, en juin, à la mise bas (Gunn et al. 2008). Ces deux pauses, marquant le début et la fin de la migration printanière, ont pu être clairement identifiées sur les trajets des caribous, permettant ainsi de déterminer les départs et les arrivées en migration. À l'automne, les individus se répartissent sur une plus grande aire qu'au printemps (Couturier et al. 2004, McNeil et al. 2005) et les grands déplacements s'observent sur une plus longue période. Ces déplacements d'automne peuvent être considérés comme un seul mouvement (e.g., Person et al. 2007) ou divisés en plusieurs phases (Couturier et al. 2004, McNeil et al. 2005). L'examen des profils FPT à l'automne a révélé 3 pauses récurrentes (Annexe 4, Figure A3.1). La première, fin août-début septembre, marque la fin des mouvements estivaux et a pu être observée dans différents troupeaux (Person et al. 2007, Poole et al. 2013). La deuxième pause, fin octobre, survient au moment du rut. Cette période biologique a été utilisée dans les précédentes études ayant considéré plusieurs phases de déplacements à l'automne pour déterminer des mouvements pré- et post-rut (Couturier et al. 2004, McNeil et al. 2005). Enfin, la troisième pause, en décembre, concorde avec le ralentissement observé lorsque les caribous arrivent sur l'aire d'hivernage (Couturier et al. 2010). Ainsi, 2 phases de déplacements ont pu être définies : un mouvement pré-migratoire, précédent le rut, suivi de la migration en tant que telle.

#### *Applications au suivi des espèces hautement mobiles*

Dans des écosystèmes avec des ressources peu abondantes et peu prévisibles, la distinction entre migration et nomadisme est faible (Mueller & Fagan 2008). Les patrons de déplacements d'espèces comme le saïga (*Saiga tatarica*, Bekenov et al. 1998), la gazelle de Mongolie (*Procapra gutturosa*, Olson et al. 2010) ou le gnou (*Connochaetes taurinus*, Boone et al. 2006) dépendent des patrons de précipitations et les individus peuvent adopter des déplacements plus proches du nomadisme que de la migration stricte en certaines saisons, voir tout au long de l'année. Parce qu'elle ne s'appuie pas sur la localisation d'aires saisonnières, l'approche proposée ici est idéale pour étudier les déplacements des espèces

hautement mobiles dont les migrations et les aires saisonnières ne montrent pas de patrons spatiaux et temporels réguliers (Mueller & Fagan 2008).

Au-delà des mouvements saisonniers, la segmentation plus fine des trajets migratoires peut permettre la mise en évidence de haltes migratoires. Pour de nombreuses espèces, ces haltes sont des composantes clés de la migration car elles permettent aux individus de pourvoir aux besoins énergétiques que requièrent les déplacements sur de longues distances (Åkesson & Hedenström 2007, Sawyer & Kauffman 2011). Par ailleurs, des changements inattendus (pauses, mouvements rapides) sur les profils FPT pourraient révéler des perturbations des voies de migrations, que celles-ci soient d'ordre naturelles ou anthropiques (Poole et al. 2010, Panzacchi et al. 2013, Sawyer et al. 2013). Enfin, entre populations d'une même espèce ou au sein d'une même population, il est possible d'observer différentes tactiques de déplacements saisonniers (Singh et al. 2012, Cagnacci et al. 2016). La présence ou l'absence inattendue de certaines pauses ou phases de déplacements rapides pourraient révéler des individus n'adoptant pas de comportement de migration "classique", ainsi que des tactiques alternatives de déplacements saisonniers.

## **Un impact direct du climat sur la migration**

### *Une migration entravée par les conditions printanières*

En réponse à l'avancement de l'émergence des ressources sur les aires d'élevage, de nombreuses espèces ont devancé leur départ en migration printanière (Tøttrup et al. 2006, Saino et al. 2007). C'est le cas des caribous du TRG et du TRF depuis 2000 (Chapitre 3). Malgré tout, la date d'arrivée sur les aires de mise bas est demeurée stable. Chez les espèces migratrices à longue distance, le fait que les changements ne se fassent pas à la même vitesse sur les aires d'hivernage et sur les aires d'élevage (Robinson et al. 2009) ou que les individus utilisent des indices indépendants du climat pour amorcer leur migration (Gordo 2007, Gilg et al. 2012) peut limiter leur capacité à s'adapter aux changements dans la phénologie d'émergence des ressources (Post & Forchhammer 2008). La migration représente un coût, les dépenses énergétiques liées aux déplacements pouvant s'avérer particulièrement élevées (Wikelski et al. 2003). Afin de limiter ces coûts certaines espèces d'oiseaux utilisent, par exemple, les vents dominants (Alerstam 2011). Chez les ongulés, la

neige est un des facteurs pouvant affecter les coûts des déplacements, voyager dans une neige abondante et poudreuse ou en train de fondre engendrant des dépenses énergétiques plus grandes (Fancy & White 1987, Hénault-Richard et al. 2014). Ainsi, les caribous privilégient les déplacements sur les lacs et rivières gelées, ainsi que les sentiers de neige compacte (Fancy & White 1987, Duquette 1988), quitte à retarder leur départ lorsque les conditions ne sont pas favorables (Duquette 1988). Bien que les caribous du TRG et du TRF partent plus tôt lors d'hivers doux, possiblement pour migrer dans des conditions favorables, les précipitations abondantes et une fonte des neiges précoce due à des températures printanières élevées (Derksen & Brown 2012) retardent la migration et ne permettent pas aux individus de maintenir la synchronie avec l'émergence des ressources (Post & Forchhammer 2008).

#### *Adapter ses déplacements au climat d'automne*

Profitant d'un maintien des conditions estivales sur une plus longue période, les espèces migratrices à courte distance vont généralement retarder leur départ à l'automne et descendre graduellement à mesure que les conditions se dégradent (Jenni & Kéry 2003, Gordo 2007). Les espèces migratrices à longue distance, lorsqu'elles sont susceptibles de rencontrer des conditions particulièrement défavorables lors de leur migration, sont plus enclines à partir tôt afin de migrer suffisamment tôt pour échapper à ces conditions (Jenni & Kéry 2003, Gordo 2007). C'est ce que semblent faire les caribous du TRG et du TRF. À l'automne, ils partent plus tôt en anticipation de conditions défavorables lors de la migration. Cependant, contrairement au printemps, la migration s'achève plus tôt. Les individus peuvent chercher à migrer avant que la neige ne soit trop abondante ou avant que ne débute l'englacement. En effet, bien que les caribous soient capables de traverser les lacs et les rivières à la nage (Poole et al. 2010, Leblond et al. 2016), la traversée de lacs et de rivières partiellement gelés peut présenter des risques accrus de blessures et de noyades (Miller & Gunn 1986, Poole et al. 2010). La phénologie de l'englacement semble par ailleurs affecter les patrons de migrations, une formation précoce de la glace contraignant les déplacements des caribous du TRG vers les aires d'hivernage du nord où, en raison de températures plus froides, les lacs et les rivières seraient potentiellement déjà gelés (Poole et al. 2010). La migration d'automne n'est pas soumise à une contrainte biologique aussi

forte que la mise bas pour laquelle les individus doivent arriver dans le bon habitat, au bon moment. À l'automne, les individus peuvent donc migrer à mesure que les conditions se dégradent, la phénologie ainsi que la voie de migration s'ajustant aux conditions rencontrées en cours de route (Jenni & Kéry 2003, Gordo 2007).

### **Disponibilité des ressources, compétition et phénologie de la migration**

Outre les variables climatiques qui peuvent affecter la capacité de déplacements des individus, l'abondance et la disponibilité des ressources sur les aires saisonnières peuvent également avoir un impact sur la phénologie de la migration. Lorsque les individus doivent acquérir une quantité spécifique de réserves énergétiques avant que ne débute la migration (Sapir et al. 2011), une diminution des ressources va entraîner un ralentissement de la mise en place de ces réserves et retarder le départ en migration (Gordo et al. 2005). Les résultats du chapitre 3 montrent un effet direct des ressources sur la phénologie des départs à l'automne mais également un effet d'une diminution de l'accessibilité aux ressources due à l'enneigement sur l'aire d'estivage et à la compétition sur l'aire d'hivernage, la disponibilité des ressources étant plus faible à taille de population élevée (Bonenfant et al. 2009). Les arrivées sont également retardées lorsque la ressource est peu ou pas encore disponible sur l'aire de destination. Au printemps, l'émergence des ressources dans les milieux nordiques est liée à la fonte des neiges (Hoye et al. 2012), une fonte hâtive, due à des températures printanières élevées, permettant un accès précoce aux ressources (Taillon 2013). À l'automne, c'est de nouveau la compétition sur l'aire d'hivernage qui semble retarder l'arrêt de la migration. Les caribous du TRG et du TRF montrant une grande variabilité dans l'utilisation de leur aires d'hivernage (Schaefer et al. 2000), en présence d'une trop forte compétition ils pourraient être amenés à continuer leur migration jusqu'à trouver un habitat convenable. Cependant, bien qu'elle affecte la composante temporelle de la migration, c'est avant tout sur la composante spatiale de la migration que la compétition apparait avoir une influence majeure. En effet le chapitre 4 démontre qu'il s'agit du facteur principal affectant le choix des destinations de la migration à l'automne.

## Compétition pour les aires d'hivernage

La densité-dépendance a souvent été étudiée pour son effet sur la dynamique des populations et sur les traits biodémographiques des ongulés (Gaillard et al. 2000, Bonenfant et al. 2009) mais récemment l'attention s'est portée sur son impact sur les stratégies de migration (Mysterud et al. 2011, Schaefer & Mahoney 2013). Peu d'études portent cependant sur l'effet de la compétition entre deux populations d'une même espèce sur les patrons de migrations. Depuis la fin des années 1980, les patrons de migrations et l'utilisation des aires d'hivernage par les caribous du TRG et du TRF ont grandement changé (Figure 4.2). Parallèlement à ces changements, les deux troupeaux ont connu de grandes fluctuations dans leur taille de population, étant tour à tour plus abondant que l'autre troupeau (Couturier et al. 2004, Rasiulis 2015). Le chapitre 4 montre un lien fort entre les variations observées dans les patrons de migration à l'automne et les variations dans la démographie des troupeaux.

### *Changement d'aires au cours de l'hiver*

En plus de permettre aux individus de suivre les changements saisonniers des ressources et d'échapper à la prédation, la migration est aussi un moyen d'éviter la compétition durant les saisons où les ressources sont moins abondantes (Mysterud et al. 2011, Avgar et al. 2014). La densité-dépendance est notamment un des facteurs avancés pour expliquer la proportion de migrants dans certaines populations présentant à la fois des individus migrants et des individus résidents (Chapman et al. 2011, Mysterud et al. 2011). Un des effets attendus dans les populations migratrices est une réduction du temps que les individus passeront sur l'aire où la ressource est la plus limitante (Mysterud et al. 2011). À Terre-Neuve, les caribous du plateau du Buchan, limitent le temps passé sur l'aire d'estivage à taille de population élevée (Schaefer & Mahoney 2013) et les cerfs de Virginie, *Odocoileus virginianus*, au Minnesota, quittent leur aire d'hivernage surpeuplée dès que les conditions d'enneigement permettent le départ (Nelson 1995). Les changements d'aires au cours de l'hiver qu'effectuent certains caribous du TRF pourraient être une réponse à une compétition élevée sur l'aire du sud-ouest due à une forte présence à la fois du TRF et du TRG. Ainsi, ces individus échapperaient à la compétition en remontant vers l'aire de mise bas 2 à 3 mois avant le départ "normal" en migration décrit au chapitre 3.



### *Migrer loin pour diminuer la compétition*

Lorsque l'abondance des migrants excède la capacité de support d'une aire saisonnière, les individus peuvent être amenés à migrer vers des aires plus éloignées (Alonso et al. 1994). Chez les ongulés, les plus grands déplacements migratoires s'observent dans les milieux les plus pauvres (Teitelbaum et al. 2015). Une réduction de la disponibilité des ressources peut pousser les individus à migrer plus loin (Bekenov et al. 1998, Ito et al. 2006). Schmelzer & Otto (2003) ont montré que l'expansion progressive de l'aire de répartition du TRG à l'hiver dans les années 1990 s'était faite à mesure que les aires d'hivernage les plus proches de l'aire de mise bas étaient exploitées puis abandonnées. C'est également la dégradation des ressources hivernales, surexploitées, qui a poussé les caribous sur l'île de Baffin à déplacer leur aire d'hivernage de plus de 200 km (Ferguson & Messier 2000). Les effets de la taille de population et de la ressource estivale sur les migrations des aires d'hivernage de l'ouest par le TRG (Chapitre 4) concordent avec les observations de Schmelzer & Otto (2003), les caribous du TRG utilisant les aires les plus éloignées préférentiellement dans un contexte de forte abondance et de surexploitation des ressources.

### *Un accès limité aux aires d'hivernage*

La répartition régionale d'une espèce migratrice sur son aire saisonnière peut être déterminée par la compétition interspécifique (Gotelli et al. 2010). Une compétition croissante pourra amener une espèce moins compétitive à changer d'aire d'hivernage (Flint et al. 2008). Plus rarement, au sein d'une même espèce, un comportement similaire est observable lorsque deux populations sont en compétition pour une même aire saisonnière (Phillips et al. 2005, Williams et al. 2008). Si la première prend l'ascendant démographique sur l'autre, il est possible que le nombre d'individus de la seconde population migrant vers cette aire diminue en conséquence, comme c'est le cas chez la petite oie des neiges, *Chen caerulescens caerulescens*, en Californie (Williams et al. 2008). Au cours des dernières décennies, la proportion de caribous du TRF migrant vers l'aire du sud-ouest a progressivement augmenté (Figure 4.2). Ce changement s'est fait à mesure que la population du TRG déclinait et suggère que le troupeau le plus abondant limite l'accès de

l'aire du sud-ouest aux individus de l'autre troupeau. Ainsi la compétition entre les deux troupeaux affecterait la répartition hivernale des caribous du TRG et du TRF.

## **Migration de printemps vs migration d'automne**

### *Migration stricte et migration nomade*

Tout au long des différents chapitres qui composent cette thèse, les déplacements au printemps et à l'automne semblent s'opposer : la migration au printemps a été relativement facile à définir (Chapitre 2) alors qu'à l'automne, elle a demandé des analyses complémentaires (Chapitre 3, Annexe 4); les caribous paraissent subir l'impact des changements climatiques au printemps alors qu'ils semblent adapter leur migration à l'automne (Chapitre 3); à l'automne les individus peuvent migrer vers différentes destinations (Chapitre 4) alors qu'ils retournent tous les ans vers la même aire de mise bas. Au printemps, la migration est fortement contrainte par la mise bas. Elle est, de fait, facilement identifiable (Chapitre 2) et correspond à la migration obligatoire décrite par Newton (2012). Cependant, la pause de la mise bas est de courte durée (Taillon 2013) et les individus amorcent dès juillet leur mouvement vers le sud (Couturier et al. 2004). Les pauses à l'automne sont observées régulièrement (Chapitre 3, Annexe 4), mais elles ne sont pas systématiques et les déplacements sont beaucoup plus variables qu'au printemps (Chapitre 2, Figure 2.3). Ces déplacements semblent s'apparenter à ceux observés chez les gnous au Serengeti par Holdo et al. (2009). Les gnous, en début de saison humide, descendent progressivement vers le sud, traquant les patrons de précipitations à travers l'écosystème (Holdo et al. 2009), ce mouvement s'apparentant plus à du nomadisme qu'à de la migration (Mueller & Fagan 2008). Malgré tout, à large échelle, les déplacements gardent une certaine directionnalité, permettant aux individus de rejoindre des aires données, tels que les sites de rut, en temps voulu (Holdo et al. 2009). Holdo et al. (2009) qualifient ces déplacements de "migrations nomades" : les déplacements, à l'échelle locale, s'accordent à la variabilité de l'environnement mais, à large échelle, répondent à des indices généraux assurant les mouvements saisonniers. Ainsi les caribous du TRG et du TRF adopteraient deux types de migration selon la saison : une migration, au sens strict, obligatoire, au printemps en réponse à la contrainte biologique de la mise bas, et une migration nomade du milieu de l'été jusqu'à la fin de l'automne, beaucoup plus variable.

### *Impacts potentiels du climat selon la saison de migration*

Dans le Nord-du-Québec et au Labrador, les modèles climatiques prévoient une augmentation des températures et des précipitations aussi bien au printemps qu'à l'automne (Sharma et al. 2009). La variabilité des déplacements à l'automne pourrait permettre aux individus de limiter l'impact de ces changements, les caribous pouvant migrer avant ou à mesure que les conditions se dégradent. Cependant, ils ne sont pas à l'abri d'évènements climatiques extrêmes tels qu'une augmentation brutale du régime des rivières occasionnant des noyades de masse (Nault & Le Hénaff 1988, Sharma et al. 2009). Un retard dans la formation de la glace pourrait engendrer des déplacements et des coûts plus grands si les caribous cherchent à contourner des lacs en eau libre (Leblond et al. 2016), coûts se répercutant sur l'aptitude phénotypique des individus (Couturier et al. 2009b). Pour certains troupeaux dont la migration nécessite la traversée de détroits gelés, un tel retard pourrait même bloquer la migration (Miller et al. 2005, Poole et al. 2010). Au printemps, le caractère rigide de la migration rend les caribous particulièrement sensibles aux modifications des conditions de déplacements. Bien que les individus partent plus tôt de l'aire d'hivernage lorsque le printemps s'annonce précoce, une fonte hâtive des neiges limite leur capacité à s'ajuster et à maintenir une synchronie avec l'émergence des ressources sur les aires de mise bas. Le constat est le même au Groenland : Post & Forchhammer (2008) ont pu noter un avancement dans les dates d'arrivée des caribous mais celui-ci n'était pas suffisant pour rattraper celui observé dans la date du pic d'émergence des ressources. Tout comme chez les oiseaux (Møller et al. 2008) cette synchronie est essentielle à la survie des jeunes (Post & Forchhammer 2008), or cette survie est une composante critique de la dynamique des populations chez les ongulés (Gaillard et al. 2000, Bonenfant et al. 2009). Ainsi, il est possible que les modifications des conditions de migration au printemps engendrées par les changements climatiques aient un impact majeur sur les populations de caribous.

### **Gestion et conservation**

La conservation d'espèces hautement mobiles constitue un énorme défi (Wilcove & Wikelski 2008, Robinson et al. 2009, Runge et al. 2014). Les trajets de migrations ou l'utilisation de certaines aires pouvant varier au cours des années, l'utilisation d'aires de

protections fixes n'est souvent pas adéquate (Robinson et al. 2009, Taillon et al. 2012b). Tout comme Taillon et al. (2012b) ont montré une variation au cours du temps de la localisation des aires de mise bas, mes résultats indiquent une grande variabilité interannuelle dans les aires d'hivernage utilisées. Plusieurs auteurs suggèrent la mise en place d'aires mobiles, tenant compte des variations saisonnières et interannuelles de la répartition des individus et des voies de migration (Wilcove & Wikelski 2008, Singh & Milner-Gulland 2011, Taillon et al. 2012b). La conservation de ces dernières est par ailleurs essentielle dans un milieu comme le nord du Québec où la présence humaine se fait de plus en plus forte (Festa-Bianchet et al. 2011), une des menaces majeures étant la perturbation des voies de migration par le développement humain (Berger 2004, Sawyer et al. 2009). La diversité des aires d'hivernage utilisées se traduit par le fait qu'au sein d'un même troupeau les individus empruntent des routes de migrations différentes. Il est alors nécessaire de concentrer les efforts de protection sur les zones les plus fréquentées, telles que les haltes migratoires, et les points de passages obligatoires de la migration (Sawyer et al. 2009), tout en assurant le maintien de la connectivité entre les aires saisonnières tout au long du trajet migratoire (Sawyer et al. 2009, Runge et al. 2014).

Les changements observés dans l'utilisation des aires d'hivernage, avec la perte de chevauchement entre les aires annuelles des deux troupeaux pose également la question de la dépendance génétique entre le TRG et le TRF. Boulet et al. (2007) ont montré qu'il n'y avait pas de différence génétique entre les caribous du TRG et du TRF et que la connectivité entre les deux troupeaux était maintenue par le recouvrement survenant pendant le rut. L'utilisation de l'aire du sud-ouest par les caribous du TRG a probablement participé, elle aussi, au maintien de cette connectivité car à plusieurs occasions des femelles du TRG, suite à un hivernage sur cette aire, sont remontées au printemps avec les caribous du TRF sans jamais revenir sur l'aire de mise bas du TRG. Outre les trajectoires démographiques différentes entre le TRG et le TRF, cette perte de connectivité, due à l'abandon des aires de l'ouest par le TRG, devrait également être prise en compte dans la désignation des deux troupeaux comme unités de gestion indépendantes (Yannic et al. 2016).

## Limites de l'étude

J'ai utilisé tout au long de ma thèse différentes sources de données pour décrire les variables environnementales. Ces jeux de données sont vraisemblablement les meilleurs disponibles pour couvrir à la fois la période et l'aire d'étude. Ils ne sont cependant pas parfaits et présentent certaines limites. Composante majeure des milieux nordiques, les caractéristiques de la neige (couvert, profondeur, densité) n'en restent pas moins difficiles à évaluer, tout comme l'état d'englacement des lacs et des rivières sur l'ensemble d'une aire d'étude aussi grande que la nôtre. J'ai supposé que les précipitations et l'équivalent en eau de la neige au sol étaient représentatifs de l'abondance de neige et j'ai associé aux températures élevées au printemps et à l'automne, respectivement une fonte précoce des neiges (Gilg et al. 2012) et un englacement tardif des lacs et des rivières (Magnuson et al. 2000). Cependant il s'agit là d'une approximation des conditions réelles d'enneigement et d'englacement. De telles données ne sont pas encore disponibles. Cependant les avancées récentes dans l'évaluation par télédétection du couvert nival, notamment à l'aide de micro-ondes, sont encourageantes (Snehmani et al. 2015) et pourraient permettre d'affiner les conclusions des chapitre 3 et 4.

Afin d'estimer la productivité végétale j'ai utilisé le NDVI (Myneni et al. 1997). Cependant, en hiver, les caribous ne dépendent pas des plantes vasculaires pour lesquelles la productivité est décrite par le NDVI, mais se nourrissent essentiellement de lichens (Couturier et al. 2009a). De fait, j'ai pu prendre en compte l'effet des ressources seulement sur l'aire d'estivage et non pendant les migrations. Des études ont porté sur l'estimation de la productivité des lichens par télédétection (Theau & Duguay 2004, Theau et al. 2005), cependant ces études ont été faites à une échelle plus fine, sur des aires d'études plus réduites. Rien n'est actuellement disponible pour évaluer la productivité en lichens à l'échelle de notre aire d'étude. Une telle information serait pourtant essentielle pour approfondir nos connaissances sur l'impact des ressources sur les migrations des caribous du TRG et du TRF.

Enfin, les individus de chaque troupeau étant capturés et équipés de manière à ce qu'ils soient indépendants, j'ai assumé que les déplacements observés à l'automne étaient

représentatifs de la population. Ainsi, j'ai considéré qu'une forte proportion d'individus d'un troupeau migrant vers une aire donnée indiquait une forte présence de ce troupeau sur cette aire. Pour valider complètement mes conclusions sur l'effet de la compétition intra- et inter-troupeaux sur les patrons de migration, il aurait été nécessaire d'avoir un estimé d'abondance pour chacun des troupeaux sur chacune des aires d'hivernage. Malheureusement ceux-ci n'existent pas et il est peu probable qu'il soit possible de les calculer.

## **Contributions et perspectives de recherche**

Au cours de ma thèse j'ai mis en évidence un effet du climat, des ressources et de la compétition sur la phénologie et les patrons de migration des caribous. Ceci n'aurait pu être fait sans avoir au préalable mis en place une approche objective pour décrire la migration et déterminer les dates de départ et d'arrivée à l'automne et au printemps. Cette approche, appropriée pour l'analyse des patrons de migration d'espèces ne présentant pas de voies de migration ou d'aires saisonnières fixes, est d'autant plus simple à appliquer que les fonctions pour les méthodes utilisées sont disponibles dans des logiciels gratuits tels que *R* (R Core Team 2015) avec le package *adehabitat* (Calenge 2006). En m'intéressant à l'effet des conditions climatiques rencontrées lors de la migration printanière, j'apporte de nouvelles connaissances qui viennent compléter l'étude récente de Taillon (2013). Mon étude est également la première à mettre en évidence un effet du climat sur la phénologie de la migration d'automne chez le caribou migrateur. Enfin mes résultats sur l'impact de la taille de population sur les patrons de migration mettent en évidence une compétition intra-troupeaux et inter-troupeaux pour les aires d'hivernage à l'échelle du Nord-du-Québec et du Labrador. Un tel effet de la compétition n'a, à ma connaissance, jamais été montré chez un ongulé migrateur.

Pour de nombreuses espèces les changements amenés par les changements climatiques dans la phénologie des processus naturels ont eu des retombées négatives sur l'aptitude phénotypique des individus et la démographie des populations (Møller et al. 2008). J'ai montré que le climat affectait la phénologie des migrations des caribous migrants. Dans le contexte actuel de déclin des populations de caribous et de rennes à

travers le monde (Vors & Boyce 2009), il est à mon sens essentiel de déterminer maintenant quelles sont les conséquences des changements observés dans la phénologie de la migration sur les paramètres biodémographiques des deux troupeaux.

En étudiant l'impact des variables environnementales sur les patrons de migration à l'automne, j'ai décrit les changements s'opérant à large échelle et identifié certains mécanismes sous-jacents. Cependant, il s'agit ici d'une image globale des patrons de migration. Le Nord-du-Québec fait l'objet d'un développement humain croissant (Festa-Bianchet et al. 2011). Afin de protéger les caribous migrateurs du TRG et du TRF, il faudrait prendre des mesures de protection sur l'ensemble des aires saisonnières et des voies de migrations qui les relient. Or, de telles mesures à l'échelle de notre aire d'étude sont peu réalistes. Il est donc essentiel de comprendre ce qui se passe à plus fine échelle. Une première étape serait d'identifier les corridors de migration. En déterminant les voies de migrations prioritaires ou les points de passages les plus utilisés, il serait alors possible de cibler les actions de protection (Sawyer et al. 2009). L'étude de la sélection de l'habitat au cours de la migration permettrait également de déterminer quelles variables environnementales affectent à fine échelle les déplacements des caribous, tels que les lacs gelés (Leblond et al. 2016), et de mieux appréhender l'impact des changements climatiques à venir.

Enfin, j'ai observé une compétition pour les aires d'hivernage entre les deux troupeaux à large échelle, mais les mécanismes qu'implique cette compétition sont inconnus à fine échelle. Pour aller plus loin, il serait intéressant d'étudier le comportement des individus des deux troupeaux lorsque ceux-ci se trouvent sur la même aire d'hivernage. Il serait intéressant de regarder s'il y a un recouvrement ou une ségrégation spatiale et temporelle entre les deux troupeaux et comment la sélection de l'habitat des individus d'un troupeau est affectée par la présence de l'autre troupeau selon que celui soit le plus abondant ou le moins représenté.

Le caribou migrateur est une espèce emblématique des milieux nordiques et a une valeur tant écologique que culturelle. Le déclin global des troupeaux observé à travers le

monde est alarmant. Face aux changements climatiques attendus ainsi qu'à l'expansion croissante de l'homme vers des territoires encore vierges il y a quelques années, il est primordial de comprendre comment les modifications de l'habitat affectent les populations de caribous afin d'anticiper les changements à venir. Mon travail est une pierre ajoutée à l'édifice des connaissances nécessaires pour relever le défi majeur que représente la conservation du caribou migrateur.



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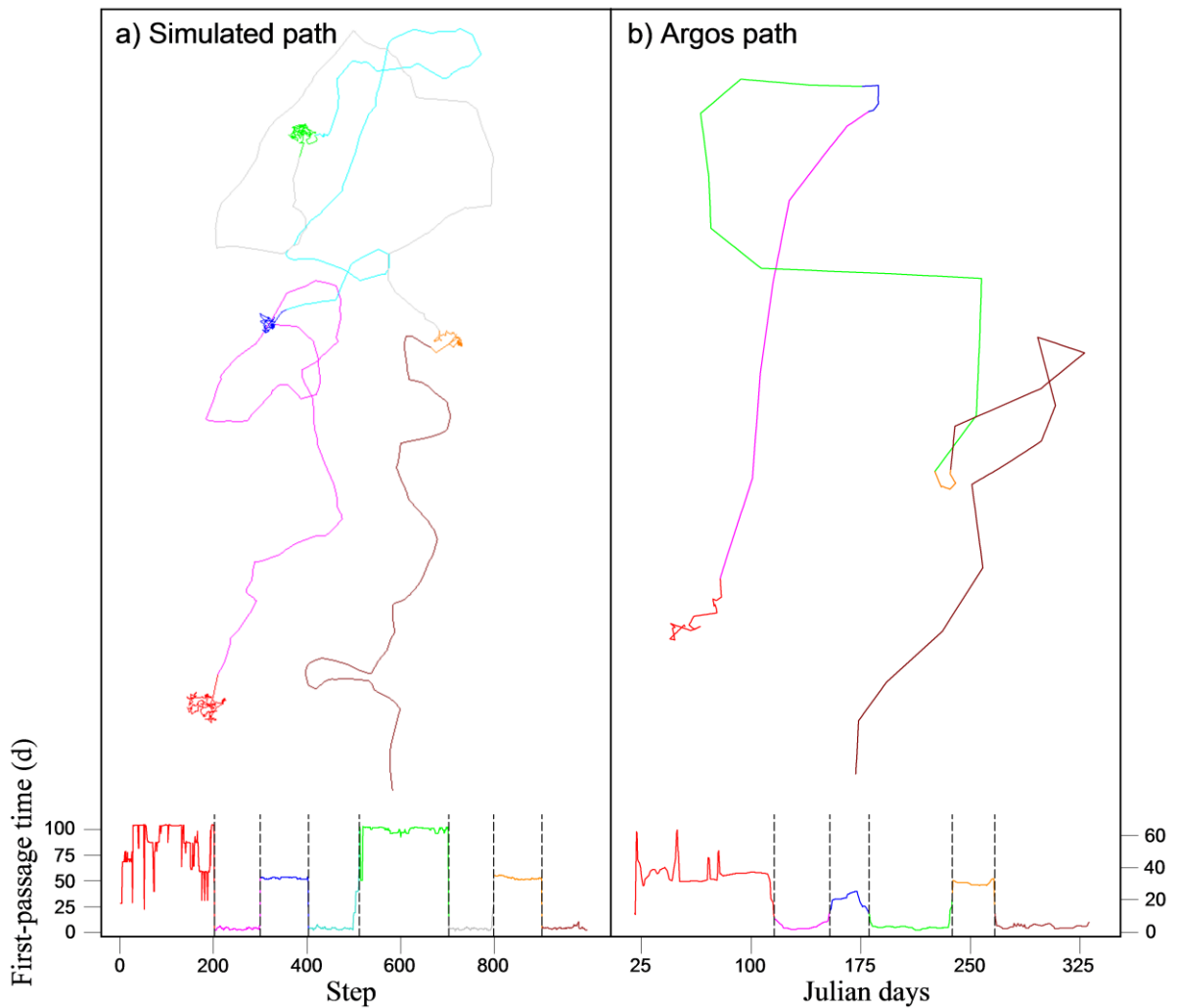
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# **Annexes**



# Annexe 1



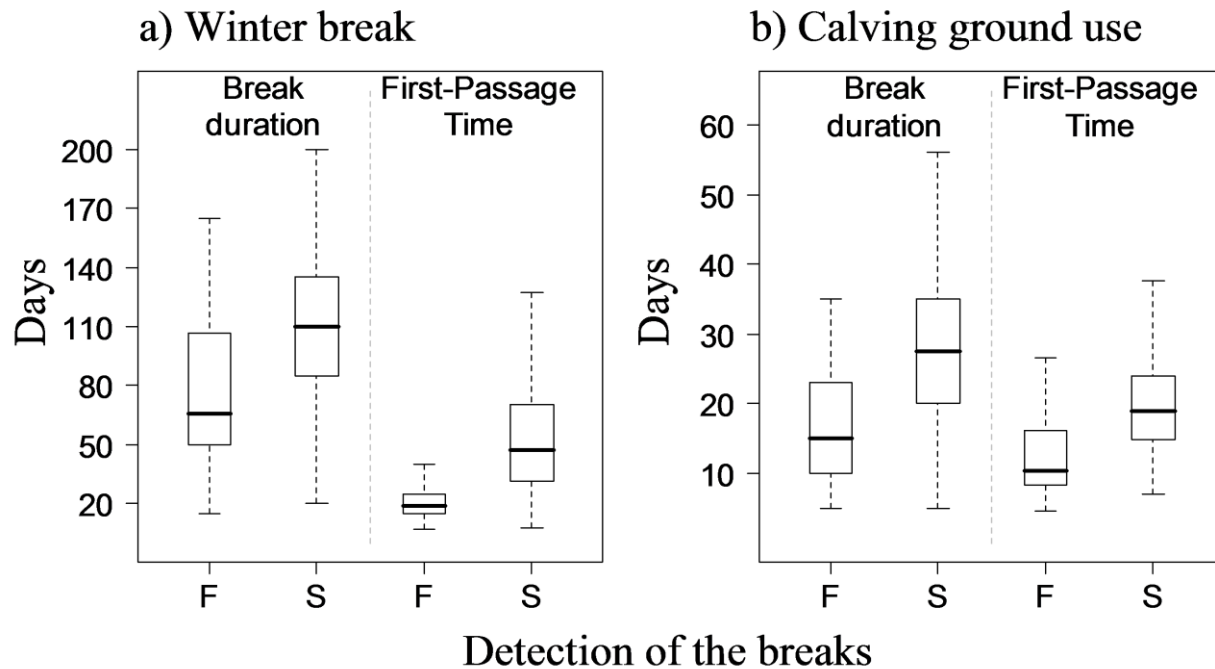
**Figure A2.1.** Simulated and Argos paths with their corresponding First-Passage Time (FPT) profiles. a) Simulated path: FPT in days (d) is presented against step number. Dashed vertical bars represent breakpoints. The coloured segments on the path correspond to the coloured segments on the FPT profile. b) Argos path: FPT is presented against time in days (d). For the Argos path, the first segment (red) was assessed by the first coarse segmentation of the complete path of the individual and the following segments were assessed by the segmentation of the inter-winter path.

## Annexe 2

**Table A2.1.** Comparison between successfully detected breaks and breaks for which the detection failed. Estimates are from generalized linear mixed models for the duration and the mean First-Passage Time (FPT) of the winter break and calving ground use, with the detection status (yes/no) as the explanatory variable, and female's identity as a random factor. The error distribution was Gaussian with an identity link function for the duration of the winter break and Gaussian with a log-link function for the mean FPT of the winter break and for the duration and the mean FPT of the calving ground use.

Response variable	Explanatory variable	Estimate	SE	<i>t</i> -value	<i>P</i> -value
Winter break					
Duration	Intercept	104.31	1.42	73.53	<0.001
	Detection	31.66	4.15	7.63	<0.001
FPT	Intercept	3.70	0.03	109.50	<0.001
	Detection	1.01	0.10	9.60	<0.001
Calving ground use					
Duration	Intercept	3.26	0.02	139.54	<0.001
	Detection	0.43	0.06	6.91	<0.001
FPT	Intercept	2.92	0.02	147.40	<0.001
	Detection	0.44	0.05	8.10	<0.001

## Annexe 3



**Figure A2.2.** Duration and First-Passage Time (FPT) value of the breaks according to their detection success. Comparison of breaks of migratory caribou detected directly by the segmentation of the First-Passage Time (FPT) profiles (Success, S) and those for which the detection failed (Failure, F) for a) the winter break and b) the calving ground use. For each panel the left side presents the differences in breaks duration (in days) and the right side represents the differences in mean FPT (in days) observed during the break. The centreline is the median, the box edges are the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> quartiles and the whiskers are the data points within the range  $\text{quartile} \pm 1.5 \times (\text{interquartile range})$ .

## Annexe 4

### **Method used to assess the migration movements.**

We combined two methods to assess departure and arrival dates of the migration: the First-Passage Time analysis (FPT, Fauchald & Tveraa 2003) to characterize movements of an individual throughout the year, and a segmentation process (Lavielle 2005) to discriminate migratory movements and seasonal range use. FPT is used to estimate the search effort along a path, assuming that individuals slow down and increase their turning rates in areas of interest and move faster and straighter to travel between patch of resources (Fauchald & Tveraa 2003). Applied to a broader scale, FPT can be used to discriminate between seasonal range use and migratory movements (Le Corre et al. 2014). FPT is computed by calculating the time taken by an individual to cross circles of a given radius centred on each location of its path. Low FPT values correspond to fast and directional movements such as migration, while high FPT correspond to slower movements expected on seasonal ranges. Based on a preliminary analysis investigating a range of different radii and detailed in Le Corre et al. 2014, we set the circle radius at 25 km. To apply FPT and the segmentation process we assumed that caribou moved linearly with a constant speed between 2 locations and we added inter-location points every 12 hours (Fauchald & Tveraa 2003, Le Corre et al. 2014). We applied FPT on complete paths, then we applied the segmentation process (Lavielle 2005) on the obtained FPT profiles. The segmentation process proposed by Lavielle (2005) allows detecting changes in a signal by locating breakpoints in the signal without knowing the initial number of breakpoints. The signal is segmented in bouts of homogeneous mean or variance. The method assesses the best segmentation for any fixed number of segments, then, the most likely number of segments is selected. We referred to Lavielle (2005) for statistical details. We segmented FPT profiles according to the mean of FPT values. We set the minimal length of segments to be detected at 1 to allow for the detection of any segment. We set the maximum number of segments to be detected at 30 as Lavielle (2005) suggested using a higher value than the expected number of segments. We proceeded in 2 steps to segment the FPT profiles: a 1<sup>st</sup> coarse segmentation was performed on the complete paths in order to detect the long winter break, during which movement rates of caribou drastically drop, then a 2<sup>nd</sup>, finest,

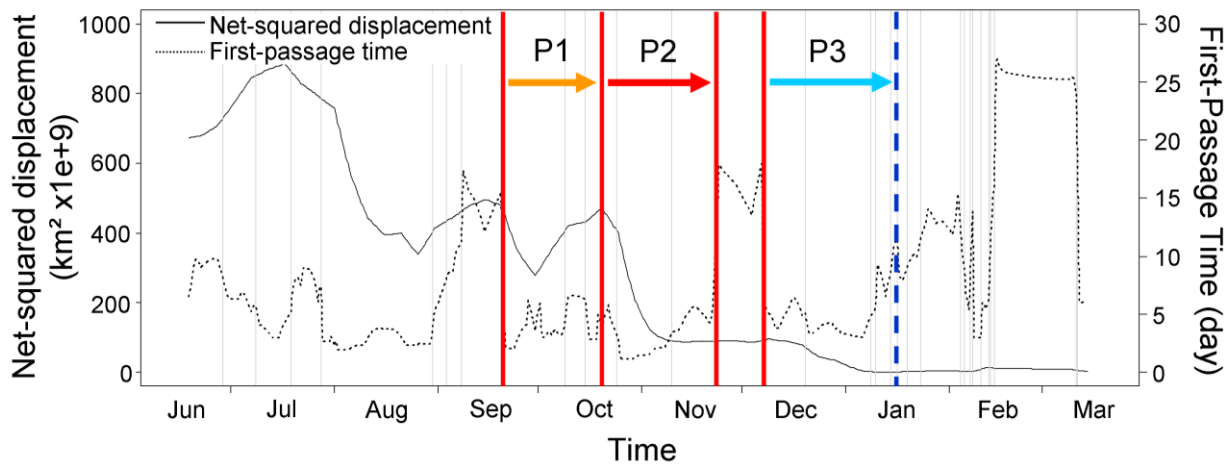
segmentation was applied to inter-winter paths to detect shorter breaks, such as calving, during annual movements. If a breakpoint corresponded to an inter-location point, we used the closest "real" location to assess the departure or arrival date.

Spring migration of caribou from the RGH and RFH was well defined by a clear departure from the winter range and the arrival on the calving ground (Le Corre et al. 2014). Fall migration, however, was more difficult to identify because of higher variations in caribou movements. During summer and fall, FPT profiles presented alternating fast movements (low FPT value) and breaks (high FPT value). Preliminary examination of the FPT profiles highlighted three relatively constant breaks during fall (Figure A3.1): the first one in late August-early September, corresponding to the end of the summer movements; the second one in late October, corresponding to the rutting period (named "rutting break" thereafter); and the third one in December, marking the arrival on the winter range. We used these three breaks to divide fall movements in two phases (Figure A3.2): the pre-migration movement, starting from the first break and ending with the rutting break, and the fall migration, starting with the departure from the rutting break and ending with the December break. Individuals sometimes performed a post-migration movement that occurred after the December break. These individuals quickly shifted to another location on the winter range before finally stopping for the long winter break.

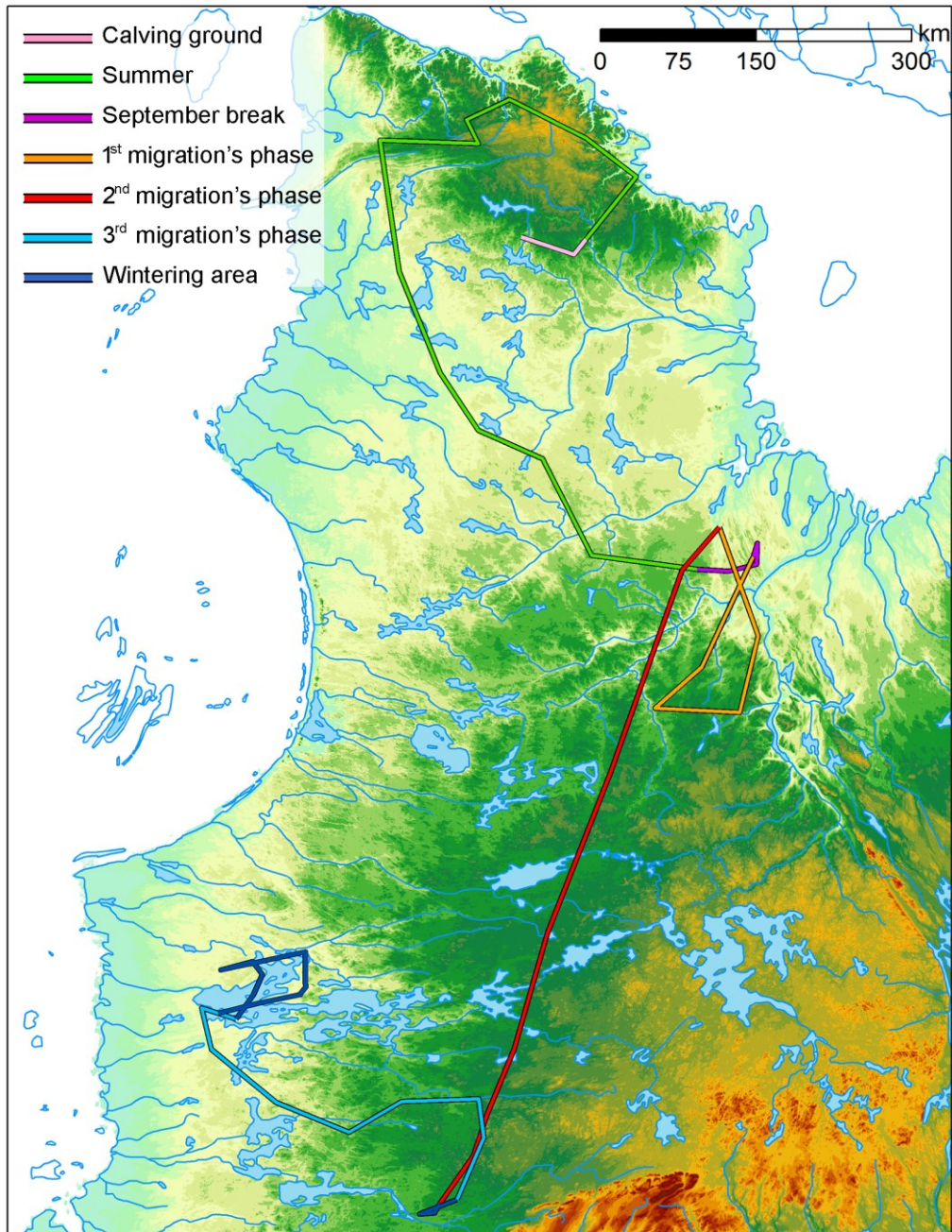
Although we could identify the three breaks along the paths of most individuals, breaks were sometimes too short to be detected by the segmentation process (see Materials and Methods, Chapter 3). To improve our ability to identify the departure and arrival dates of the fall migration, we calculated the Net-Squared Displacements (NSD, Bunnefeld et al. 2011, Figure A3.1). NSD corresponds to the squared distance of any given location of the path to a fix location. For each annual path, we used the first location of the winter break as the reference location and we computed the NSD for each previous location (Le Corre et al. 2014). We observed a steady decrease in NSD as individuals approached the winter range and, conversely, an increase when they moved away from it.

The second phase of the fall migration was characterised by a strong decrease in the NSD values (Figure A3.1), as individuals were approaching the winter break location. To assess the timing of the fall migration, we used the breakpoint in FPT profiles corresponding to the end of the rutting break as the priority signal of the departure date.

When detection failed, however, we used the location for which NSD started to decrease as the departure location. We assessed arrival date using the breakpoint in the FPT profile corresponding to the beginning of the December break. When a caribou performed a post-migration movement, we considered the first break on the winter range as the end of the migration.



**Figure A3.1.** First-Passage time (FPT, dotted lines) and Net-Squared Displacement (NSD, black lines) profiles of a fall migration with the two phases of migration and the post-migration movement. Vertical grey lines indicate breakpoints in the FPT profile. The vertical blue dashed line indicates the reference location used to calculate NSD. Vertical red lines indicate starting and ending dates of the different phases of the fall migration movement. The first phase (P1) starts at the end of the September break. The peak in NSD observed in October corresponds to the initiation of the second phase (P2), the fall migration, that ends at the arrival on the winter range in late November with an increase of the FPT. The post-migration movement (P3) starts after the short break at the beginning of December and ends in January, when the winter break starts.



**Figure A3.2.** Example of a fall migration movement of a female migratory caribou from the Rivière-aux-Feuilles herd presenting a pre-migration movement (yellow), the fall migration (red) and a post-migration movement (light blue).

## Annexe 5

**Table A3.1.** Summary of the selection procedure for linear mixed-models examining the departure date for the spring migration of female caribou from northern Québec and Labrador. We report number of parameters ( $k$ ), AICc,  $\Delta$ AICc and AICc weights ( $\omega_i$ ) for each model.

Models	$k$	AICc	$\Delta$ AICc	$\omega_i$
<b>swe_apr + st_winter + pcp_winter + st_apr + pcp_apr + herd + pop_size + dist_mig</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>2556.9</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.60</b>
<b>swe_winter + st_winter + pcp_winter + st_apr + pcp_apr + herd + pop_size + dist_mig</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>2558.7</b>	<b>1.8</b>	<b>0.25</b>
swe_winter + NAO_winter + NAO_apr + herd + pop_size + dist_mig	9	2559.6	2.7	0.16
swe_winter + st_winter + pcp_winter + herd + pop_size + dist_mig	9	2574.5	17.5	0.00
swe_winter + NAO_winter, + herd + pop_size + dist_mig	8	2593.6	36.6	0.00
swe_winter + herd + pop_size + dist_mig	7	2607.0	50.1	0.00
swe_apr + NAO_winter + NAO_apr + herd + pop_size + dist_mig	9	2673.9	117.0	0.00
swe_apr + NAO_apr + herd + pop_size + dist_mig	8	2703.9	147.0	0.00
swe_apr + st_apr + pcp_apr + herd + pop_size + dist_mig	9	2730.6	173.7	0.00
swe_apr + herd + pop_size + dist_mig	7	2745.0	188.0	0.00
herd + pop_size + dist_mig	6	2745.5	188.6	0.00
Null	3	3029.6	472.7	0.00

Best model ( $\Delta$ AICc  $\leq 2$ ) is shown in bold. swe: snow water equivalent; st: temperature; pcp: precipitation; NAO: North Atlantic Oscillation; pop\_size: population size; dist\_mig: distance of migration; apr: April.



**Table A3.2.** Summary of the selection procedure for linear mixed-models examining the arrival date for the spring migration of female caribou from northern Québec and Labrador. We report number of parameters ( $k$ ), AICc,  $\Delta$ AICc and AICc weights ( $\omega_i$ ) for each model.

Models	$k$	AICc	$\Delta$ AICc	$\omega_i$
<b>swe_may + sc_may + ic_may + swe_june + sc_june + ic_june + NAO_may + NAO_june + ndvi_june * pop_size + herd + dist_mig</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>1952.5</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.71</b>
<b>swe_may + sc_may + ic_may + swe_june + sc_june + ic_june + st_may + pcp_may + st_june + pcp_june + ndvi_june * pop_size + herd + dist_mig</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>1954.5</b>	<b>2.0</b>	<b>0.26</b>
swe_may + sc_may + ic_may + swe_june + sc_june + ic_june + NAO_may + NAO_june + herd + pop_size + dist_mig	14	1958.8	6.3	0.03
swe_may + sc_may + ic_may + swe_june + sc_june + ic_june + st_may + pcp_may + st_june + pcp_june + herd + pop_size + dist_mig	16	1964.3	11.8	0
swe_may + sc_may + ic_may + swe_june + sc_june + ic_june + ndvi_june * pop_size + herd + dist_mig	14	1970.8	18.3	0
swe_may + sc_may + ic_may + swe_june + sc_june + ic_june + herd + pop_size + dist_mig	12	1982.3	29.8	0
swe_june + sc_june + ic_june + st_june + pcp_june + ndvi_june * pop_size + herd + dist_mig	13	2100.1	147.6	0
swe_june + sc_june + ic_june + NAO_june + ndvi_june * pop_size + herd + dist_mig	12	2104.8	152.3	0
swe_june + sc_june + ic_june + st_june + pcp_june + herd + pop_size + dist_mig	11	2105.9	153.4	0
swe_june + sc_june + ic_june + ndvi_june * pop_size + herd + dist_mig	11	2107.3	154.8	0
swe_june + sc_june + ic_june + NAO_june + herd + pop_size + dist_mig	10	2108.8	156.3	0
swe_june + sc_june + ic_june + herd + pop_size + dist_mig	9	2112.2	159.7	0
swe_may + sc_may + ic_may + NAO_may + herd + pop_size + dist_mig	10	2373.4	420.9	0
swe_may + sc_may + ic_may + st_may + pcp_may + herd + pop_size + dist_mig	11	2408.5	456.0	0
swe_may + sc_may + ic_may + herd + pop_size + dist_mig	9	2430.9	478.4	0
herd + pop_size + dist_mig	6	2650.2	697.7	0
Null	3	2786.5	834.0	0

Best model ( $\Delta$ AICc  $\leq 2$ ) is shown in bold. swe: snow water equivalent; sc: snow cover; ic: ice cover; st: temperature; pcp: precipitation; NAO: North Atlantic Oscillation; ndvi: Normalized Difference Vegetation Index; pop\_size: population size; dist\_mig: distance of migration.

**Table A3.3.** Summary of the selection procedure for linear mixed-models examining the departure date for the fall migration of female caribou from northern Québec and Labrador. We report number of parameters ( $k$ ), AICc,  $\Delta$ AICc and AICc weights ( $\omega_i$ ) for each model.

Models	$k$	AICc	$\Delta$ AICc	$\omega_i$
<b>swe_sept + sc_sept + ic_sept + sc_oct + ic_oct + st_sept + pcp_sept + st_oct + pcp_oct + ndvi_sept * pop_size + ndvi_oct * pop_size + herd + dist_mig</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>2849.7</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.99</b>
swe_sept + sc_sept + ic_sept + sc_oct + ic_oct + ndvi_sept * pop_size + ndvi_oct * pop_size + herd + dist_mig	15	2860.0	10.4	0.01
swe_sept + sc_sept + ic_sept + sc_oct + ic_oct + NAO_sept + NAO_oct + ndvi_sept * pop_size + ndvi_oct * pop_size + herd + dist_mig	17	2860.1	10.4	0.01
swe_sept + sc_sept + ic_sept + sc_oct + ic_oct + st_sept + pcp_sept + st_oct + pcp_oct + herd + pop_size + dist_mig	15	2875.9	26.2	0
swe_sept + sc_sept + ic_sept + sc_oct + ic_oct + herd + pop_size + dist_mig	11	2894.5	44.8	0
swe_sept + sc_sept + ic_sept + sc_oct + ic_oct + NAO_sept + NAO_oct + herd + pop_size + dist_mig	13	2894.8	45.1	0
sc_oct + ic_oct + st_oct + pcp_oct + ndvi_oct * pop_size + herd + dist_mig	12	3028.4	178.7	0
sc_oct + ic_oct + ndvi_oct * pop_size + herd + dist_mig	10	3048.1	198.5	0
swe_sept + sc_sept + ic_sept + ndvi_sept * pop_size + herd + dist_mig	11	3049.7	200.0	0
sc_oct + ic_oct + NAO_oct + ndvi_oct * pop_size + herd + dist_mig	11	3049.9	200.3	0
swe_sept + sc_sept + ic_sept + NAO_sept + ndvi_sept * pop_size + herd + dist_mig	12	3051.0	201.3	0
swe_sept + sc_sept + ic_sept + st_sept + pcp_sept + ndvi_sept * pop_size + herd + dist_mig	13	3051.6	202.0	0
sc_oct + ic_oct + st_oct + pcp_oct + herd + pop_size + dist_mig	10	3055.8	206.1	0
swe_sept + sc_sept + ic_sept + herd + pop_size + dist_mig	9	3056.8	207.1	0
swe_sept + sc_sept + ic_sept + NAO_sept + herd + pop_size + dist_mig	10	3058.6	209.0	0
swe_sept + sc_sept + ic_sept + st_sept + pcp_sept + herd + pop_size + dist_mig	11	3058.7	209.0	0
sc_oct + ic_oct + herd + pop_size + dist_mig	8	3074.8	225.2	0
sc_oct + ic_oct + NAO_oct + herd + pop_size + dist_mig	9	3076.9	227.2	0
herd + pop_size + dist_mig	6	3243.6	393.9	0
Null	3	3531.9	682.3	0

Best model ( $\Delta$ AICc  $\leq 2$ ) is shown in bold. swe: snow water equivalent; sc: snow cover; ic: ice cover; st: temperature; pcp: precipitation; NAO: North Atlantic Oscillation; ndvi: Normalized Difference Vegetation Index; pop\_size: population size; dist\_mig: distance of migration; sept: September; oct: October.

**Table A3.4.** Summary of the selection procedure for linear mixed-models examining the arrival date for the fall migration of female caribou from northern Québec and Labrador. We report number of parameters ( $k$ ), AICc,  $\Delta$ AICc and AICc weights ( $\omega_i$ ) for each model.

Models	$k$	AICc	$\Delta$ AICc	$\omega_i$
<b>swe_nov + sc_nov + ic_nov + swe_dec + sc_dec + ic_dec + st_nov + pcp_nov + st_dec + pcp_dec + herd + pop_size + dist_mig</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>3177.8</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.60</b>
swe_nov + sc_nov + ic_nov + swe_dec + sc_dec + ic_dec + NAO_nov + NAO_dec + herd + pop_size + dist_mig	<b>14</b>	<b>3178.6</b>	<b>0.8</b>	<b>0.40</b>
swe_nov + sc_nov + ic_nov + swe_dec + sc_dec + ic_dec + herd + pop_size + dist_mig	12	3194.3	16.6	0
swe_nov + sc_nov + ic_nov + st_nov + pcp_nov + herd + pop_size + dist_mig	11	3212.7	34.9	0
swe_nov + sc_nov + ic_nov + herd + pop_size + dist_mig	9	3227.1	49.3	0
swe_nov + sc_nov + ic_nov + NAO_nov + herd + pop_size + dist_mig	10	3227.4	49.6	0
swe_dec + sc_dec + ic_dec + st_dec + pcp_dec + herd + pop_size + dist_mig	11	3293.8	116.0	0
swe_dec + sc_dec + ic_dec + NAO_dec + herd + pop_size + dist_mig	10	3294.6	116.8	0
swe_dec + sc_dec + ic_dec + herd + pop_size + dist_mig	9	3296.8	119.0	0
herd + pop_size + dist_mig	6	3331.6	153.8	0
null	3	3688.7	510.9	0

Best models ( $\Delta$ AICc  $\leq 2$ ) are shown in bold. swe: snow water equivalent; sc: snow cover; ic: ice cover; st: temperature; pcp: precipitation; NAO: North Atlantic Oscillation; pop\_size: population size; dist\_mig: distance of migration; nov: November; dec: December.

## Annexe 6

### Relationship between NAO and climate variables in September and October in the range of migratory caribou in Québec-Labrador.

We related NAO of September and October with climate data (temperature and precipitation) from 4 weather stations of Environment Canada (Kuujuaq: 58°06'N-68°25'W, data spanning from 1947 to 2005; Schefferville: 54°48'N-66°49'W, 1949-1993; La Grande: 53°38'N-77°42'W, 1976-2005, Goose Bay: 53°19'N-60°25'W, 1942-2011; climat.meteo.gc.ca), using linear mixed models (*lme4* R package, Bates et al. 2014). Models were fitted with monthly NAO as the response variable, the monthly average temperatures, monthly total precipitation, monthly total rainfall and monthly total snowfall as explanatory variables and the weather station ID as a random factor. For each month we tested a set of models presented in Table A4.1 and Table A4.2, and we calculated parameter estimates and 95% CIs using model averaging (Burnham & Anderson 2002). We provide parameter estimates with their SE and 95% CIs in Table A4.3.

**Table A4.1.** Set of linear mixed-models examining the relationship between NAO in September, and temperature and precipitation in September throughout the range of migratory caribou in Québec-Labrador. We report number of parameters ( $k$ ), AICc,  $\Delta$ AICc and AICc weights ( $\omega_i$ ) for each model. The best model is shown in bold.

Model	$k$	AICc	$\Delta$ AICc	$\omega_i$
null	3	353.02	7.05	0.01
temperature	4	348.05	2.08	0.1
rainfall	4	346.88	0.9	0.18
snowfall	4	347.56	1.58	0.13
total precipitation	4	349.31	3.34	0.05
<b>temperature + rainfall</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>345.98</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0.28</b>
temperature + snowfall	5	348.24	2.26	0.09
temperature + total precipitation	5	347.02	1.04	0.17

**Table A4.2.** Set of linear mixed-models examining the relationship between NAO in October, and temperature and precipitation in October throughout the range of migratory caribou in Québec-Labrador. We report number of parameters ( $k$ ), AICc,  $\Delta$ AICc and AICc weights ( $\omega_i$ ) for each model. The best model is shown in bold.

Model	$k$	AICc	$\Delta$ AICc	$\omega_i$
null	3	516.46	19.46	0
temperature	4	504.74	7.74	0.01
rainfall	4	498.48	1.48	0.25
snowfall	4	511.67	14.67	0
total precipitation	4	502.29	5.29	0.04
temperature + rainfall	5	499.43	2.44	0.15
temperature + snowfall	5	502.01	5.01	0.04
<b>temperature + total precipitation</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>497</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0.51</b>

**Table A4.3.** Parameter estimates calculated by model averaging for the models examining the relationship between NAO and temperature and precipitation in September and October. Variables for which 95% CI exclude 0 are considered statistically significant and are indicated in bold.

Variable	Estimate	SE	95% CI	
<i>September</i>				
<b>temperature</b>	<b>-0.052</b>	<b>0.023</b>	<b>-0.097</b>	<b>-0.008</b>
rainfall	-0.002	0.001	-0.005	0.000
snowfall	0.005	0.004	-0.003	0.012
total precipitation	-0.002	0.001	-0.004	0.001
<i>October</i>				
<b>temperature</b>	<b>-0.069</b>	<b>0.035</b>	<b>-0.137</b>	<b>-0.001</b>
<b>rainfall</b>	<b>-0.007</b>	<b>0.002</b>	<b>-0.012</b>	<b>-0.002</b>
snowfall	-0.006	0.003	-0.013	0.001
<b>total precipitation</b>	<b>-0.006</b>	<b>0.002</b>	<b>-0.010</b>	<b>-0.002</b>