



Wildlife Watch

WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT ADVISORY COUNCIL (NORTH SLOPE)
COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

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Caribou and Muskox Living Together

Some residents of the North have expressed concern that numbers of muskox on Banks Island have increased while the Peary caribou numbers have decreased and almost disappeared. Concerned elders do not want this to happen on the mainland where reintroduced muskoxen have established breeding grounds within the range of the Porcupine caribou herd.

Question: Will the reintroduction of muskoxen on the mainland, near the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, cause a decline in the caribou population?

Answer: No. There is a long history of caribou and muskox living together on the mainland.

Explanation: Decreases in the number of caribou on Banks Island is most likely related to poor quality food and frequent icings, rather than to increases in the muskox population. Muskoxen are better able than caribou to survive these winter conditions. This information is based on a report prepared for the Wildlife Management Advisory Council (North Slope).

On the mainland, however, habitats are good for

both caribou and muskoxen. In winter, caribou will move into the trees where icings are rare and lichens, their main winter food, are abundant.

Has there been proof that muskoxen and caribou can live together?

Yes. The 120,000 Bluenose caribou live together with about 5,000 muskoxen just across the Mackenzie River. In fact, both herds have enjoyed a substantial increase throughout the 1980's and there is a long history of them living together in harmony.

What can be done to monitor the situation?

Although the example of the Bluenose herd is a very positive indicator for the future of the Porcupine caribou herd, it is still important to study the Banks Island example. A biologist from the NWT Department of Renewable Resources has begun a five-year study to look at the situation on Banks Island more thoroughly.

It looks as though the two species will be able to continue living together without competition. Indeed, the example of the Bluenose is proof !



Elderhost Program on Herschel Island

Lucy Inglangasuk enjoyed last year's Elderhost program on Herschel Island so much she wants to go back again this year. Although arrangements for this year's program haven't been finalized, many agree that last year was a success.

Summer 1993 marked the first Elderhost program. It was sponsored by the Herschel Island Territorial Park which provided transportation and accommodation for elders who had spent part of

their lives on Herschel or other nearby islands. They now have no means of getting back there and the park has provided this opportunity.

Lucy Inglangasuk was raised on nearby Kendall Island and moved to Aklavik in 1952. Last year's experience at Herschel was like a holiday, she said.

"We did lots of walking, visiting and storytelling in the evenings."

Although it was too early for any real fishing, Lucy wants to go back. "Even the mosquitoes weren't too bad," she said with a laugh.

The objective of this new program is to give elders a chance to relive old memories and to use their stories in developing the park's interpretive plan. Senior Park Ranger Andy Tardiff says the elders make an invaluable contribution to the documentation of Herschel's history.

"The elders tell stories of people who occupied the area in the 1930's, 40's, 50's, and even 60's. Their oral history and their traditional experiences allow us as park staff to catalogue this vast knowledge and preserve it."

Tardiff would also like to invite some of the RCMP special constables back to Herschel.

"They are now elders, too:" he said, "and it would be great to get them all there at the same time and document this period of history from both sides."

The 1994 Elderhost program will encourage elders



Aklavik elder Lucy Inglangasuk inspects a formerly used ice house.

from across the delta who have spent time on Herschel to participate. If elders don't want to hunt while they're there, Tardiff is encouraging donations of meat from local hunters and trappers. However, if there is hunting, he would like to document on video how the elders process their meat and give names to various parts of the animal.

"This would be useful in educating our youth," he predicts.

Of course, the program is only a year old and some of the organizational glitches need to be worked out. The favorable reviews that have come in so far indicate this is a program worth pursuing. Elders and park staff give it "two thumbs up."

Hot Off the Presses!

The final draft of the Yukon North Slope Wildlife Conservation and Management Plan is complete and being circulated for final comments.

Wildlife Management Advisory Council (North Slope)

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• **Government of Canada:** Joan Eamer, Canadian Wildlife Service; Alternate: Alan Fehr, Parks Canada

• **Government of Yukon:** Brian Pelchat, Renewable Resources; Alternate: Dorothy Cooley, Renewable Resources
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