

# Welcome to the Woodland Caribou Mini-Museum.

**My name is Gavin Hanke, and I'm the curator of vertebrate zoology at the Royal BC Museum. I study fishes, amphibians and reptiles, but as the vertebrate curator, I am also responsible for birds and mammals.**

Caribou are symbolic of untamed wilderness. While they are widespread in the northern hemisphere, not all populations are found in massive herds on Arctic tundra. In British Columbia, we had two subspecies of Caribou, but our Dawson's Caribou is now extinct. The Woodland Caribou remains and its populations are at risk. Biologists have subdivided our Woodland Caribou based on winter diet and annual movements into Boreal, Northern, and Mountain ecotypes.

The Boreal type of Woodland Caribou lives in small groups in the north-eastern part of the province in Boreal White and Black Spruce Zone forests. They don't migrate far each year and feed on terrestrial lichen in the winter. The Northern type lives in a variety of forest zones in mountains of western and northern BC. They usually migrate twice a year, and feed mostly on terrestrial lichens in winter. The Mountain type lives at high elevations in south-eastern BC. They are known to make 4 migrations a year, and feed on arboreal lichens in winter.



**DR. GAVIN HANKE,  
CURATOR OF VERTEBRATE ZOOLOGY  
AT THE ROYAL BC MUSEUM**

British Columbia's  
**SPECIES  
AT RISK**

A Travelling Exhibition

Presented by



ROYAL BC MUSEUM

# Woodland Caribou

A Canadian symbol



## Fun with **Form** and **Function**

Many features of Caribou antlers are unique. Female Woodland Caribou, unlike females of other deer species, regularly grow antlers—these are shorter than the antlers of the males, but they last longer. The antlers have a distinctive shape, with pointed tines and (in the males) a spatula-like portion. Caribou are the only deer species in BC to grow antlers in their first year of life.

Why do you think females grow antlers? Do they help in defending against predators? Or do females have to compete with males for food in winter?

Caribou are also recognizable by their broad, rounded hooves and the dewclaws on their legs. Together, these features help the animals walk on crusty snow, preventing them from sinking too deep. The large hooves also work like shovels to help dig through snow to reach lichen on the ground.

Did you know that Caribou click as they walk? As tendons move over certain bones in their feet, they make a clicking sound—it's almost like they're cracking their knuckles with every step.

Caribou pelts are renowned for their insulating properties. The hollow long guard hairs and dense fine undercoat work together like a sweater and a wind proof jacket.



## Caring for Caribou

From the perspective of a wildlife biologist, Caribou can be challenging to study. Caribou move every day, ranging over wide areas and through dense forests, which makes them hard to track. If you're limited to travelling on roads and working on foot, following herds in remote areas can be especially difficult. Aerial surveys are expensive, as are radio collars and transmitters, but these high-tech solutions may be the only easy way to track a herd's movement.

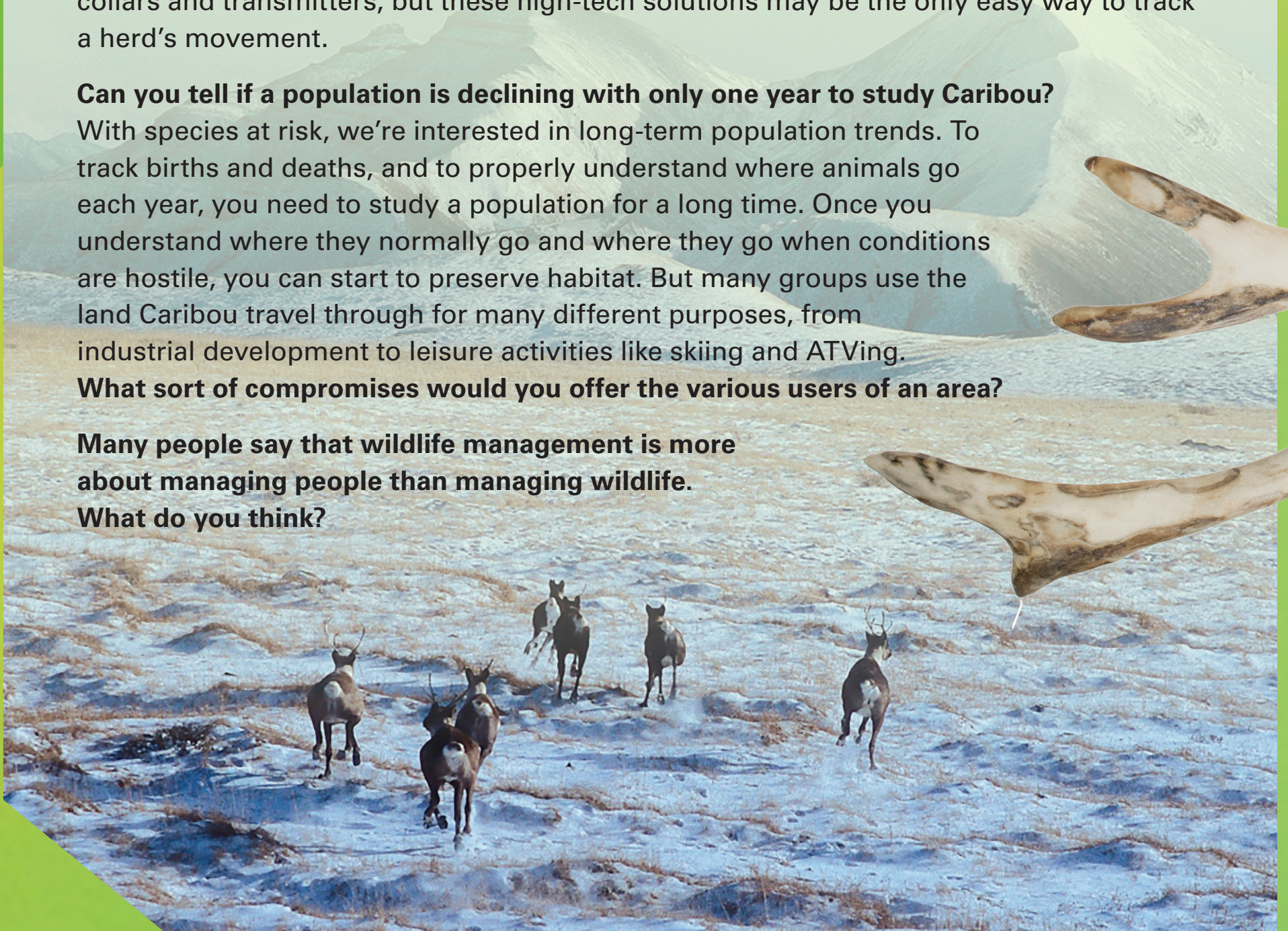
### **Can you tell if a population is declining with only one year to study Caribou?**

With species at risk, we're interested in long-term population trends. To track births and deaths, and to properly understand where animals go each year, you need to study a population for a long time. Once you understand where they normally go and where they go when conditions are hostile, you can start to preserve habitat. But many groups use the land Caribou travel through for many different purposes, from industrial development to leisure activities like skiing and ATVing.

### **What sort of compromises would you offer the various users of an area?**

**Many people say that wildlife management is more about managing people than managing wildlife.**

**What do you think?**





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## Cariboo Spyware

**Do you think we should track large animals so that we know where they are at all times? What if people could make decisions about where to hike or camp based on a website or an app? Interacting with humans is stressful for wildlife—if we knew where a herd was, we could choose to leave Caribou in peace. Is tracking like this a good idea? Or would it make life easy for poachers?**

From the perspective of industry, high-tech up-to-the-minute tracking could help companies plan low-impact exploration, which would be good for public relations. We know that industry will continue to explore for oil and other natural resources, so we need to find ways to balance the needs of people with those of wildlife. **What would you suggest?**

