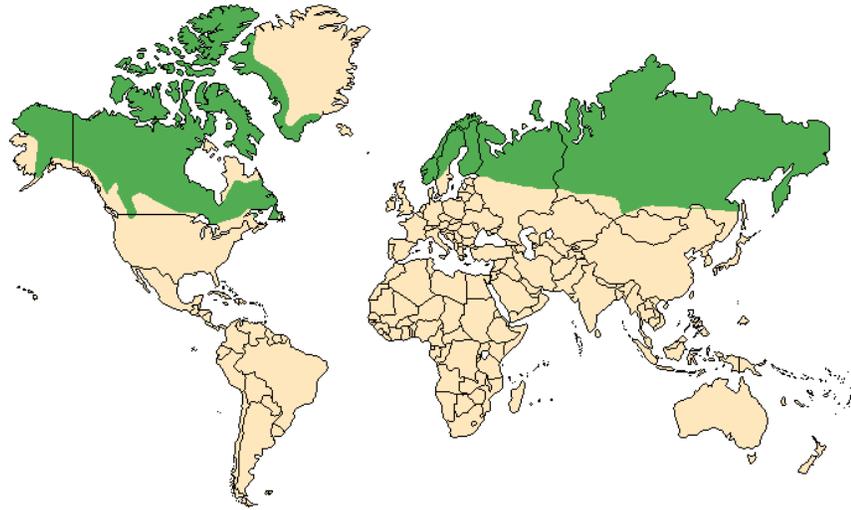


Reindeer / Caribou

Rangifer tarandus

Kingdom Animalia
Phylum Chordata
Class Mammalia
Order Artiodactyla
Family Cervidae



Native to: Arctic tundra and adjacent boreal forests

Status: Least Concern (IUCN)

The most significant threat to reindeer are humans due to habitat destruction and potential over-hunting. Natural predators include bears, wolves, and even birds of prey who will hunt newborn calves.

Appearance & Lifespan

Reindeer are referred to as caribou in North America. On average they weigh 113 kg and stand 120 cm at the shoulder, with males being larger than females. Both males and the females have antlers, though the males' are generally larger and more complex. Males also have a thick mane of fur around the lower part of the neck. Reindeer have two layers of fur, a long-haired overcoat and a dense, woolly undercoat. They have a short tail and broad, rounded hooves that act as snowshoes. Reindeer can live up to 20 years.



Behaviour & Reproduction

Reindeer may travel up to 5,000 km (3,000 miles) in a year! Most populations migrate in the spring and fall, moving 19-55 km (11-33 miles) per day. They can run 60-80 kmh (36-48 mph) and swim up to 10 kmh (6 mph.) They rely heavily on their sense of smell to locate food as danger and their sense of sight and hearing are not well developed. They have several vocalizations including snorts, a bawl, and a grunting roar (made by rutting males.) Population densities are quite sparse being generally 0.5 animals per square kilometer of suitable habitat. However, during the migration period, concentrations may exceed 19,000 animals per square kilometer!

Most breeding occurs in the winter with births occurring in May/June after a gestation period of 228 days. Females typically give birth to a single calf. This offspring is weaned at 6 months old and will become sexually mature after 2.5 years.

Ecology & Conservation

Reindeer are herbivores, feeding on a variety of plants. In the summer they eat primarily grass and lichen in the winter, though sedges, leaves of willows and birches, and mosses are also all consumed.

Bears, wolves, and birds of prey are all natural predators of reindeer. Humans also cause a significant threat through habitat destruction and possible over-hunting. As a whole, the reindeer species' status is of least concern (IUCN) though one sub-species (*R. t. pearyi*) is classified as endangered (IUCN 1996).

Did You Know?

1. Reindeer are known as "Caribou" in North America. Contrary to popular belief, they are the same species.
2. Caribou calves can walk 1-2 hours after birth and can outrun a human in just one day!
3. When caribou walk, a tendon in the foot slides over a bone producing a clicking sound. Migrating reindeer sound like a large number of castanets going crazy!

