



Migratory tundra caribou: status and trends, 2026 update

Migratory tundra caribou herds peaked in the 1990s and early 2000s then declined 71%, from 5.5 million to 1.6 million by 2025. Caribou and wild reindeer have long been known to cycle in abundance over decades but changing Arctic landscapes and a warmer climate are interacting to change the pattern of the cycles. While a few herds are recovering, other herds remain at the low part of their cycle and still other herds have started to decline.

CARMA tracks the status and trends of 23 circumarctic herds based on variably-timed, government estimates which includes a third of the herd size estimates being updated in 2025. The updates reveal a rapid recovery of caribou on Baffin Island as well as a continued recovery of the Cape Bathurst Herd. However, the 2025 updates also revealed the Porcupine and Central Arctic herds have started declining and, at the present rates, it will take decades for other herds to double their number. For the 15 herds (Table 1, Figure 1) with sufficient information, four herds are rapidly declining at a halving rate 10 years or less, while three herds are declining more slowly, halving at >10 years. Two herds are rapidly increasing and are doubling at a rate of <5 years after having reached low numbers. Six herds are stable after being at low numbers with a low rate of change (doubling >30 years). A complication for interpreting trends is seasonal movements of caribou between some neighboring herds, changes in methods, and the effect of weather. A more recent approach to support interpretation of trends is integrated population modelling using survival and productivity rates.

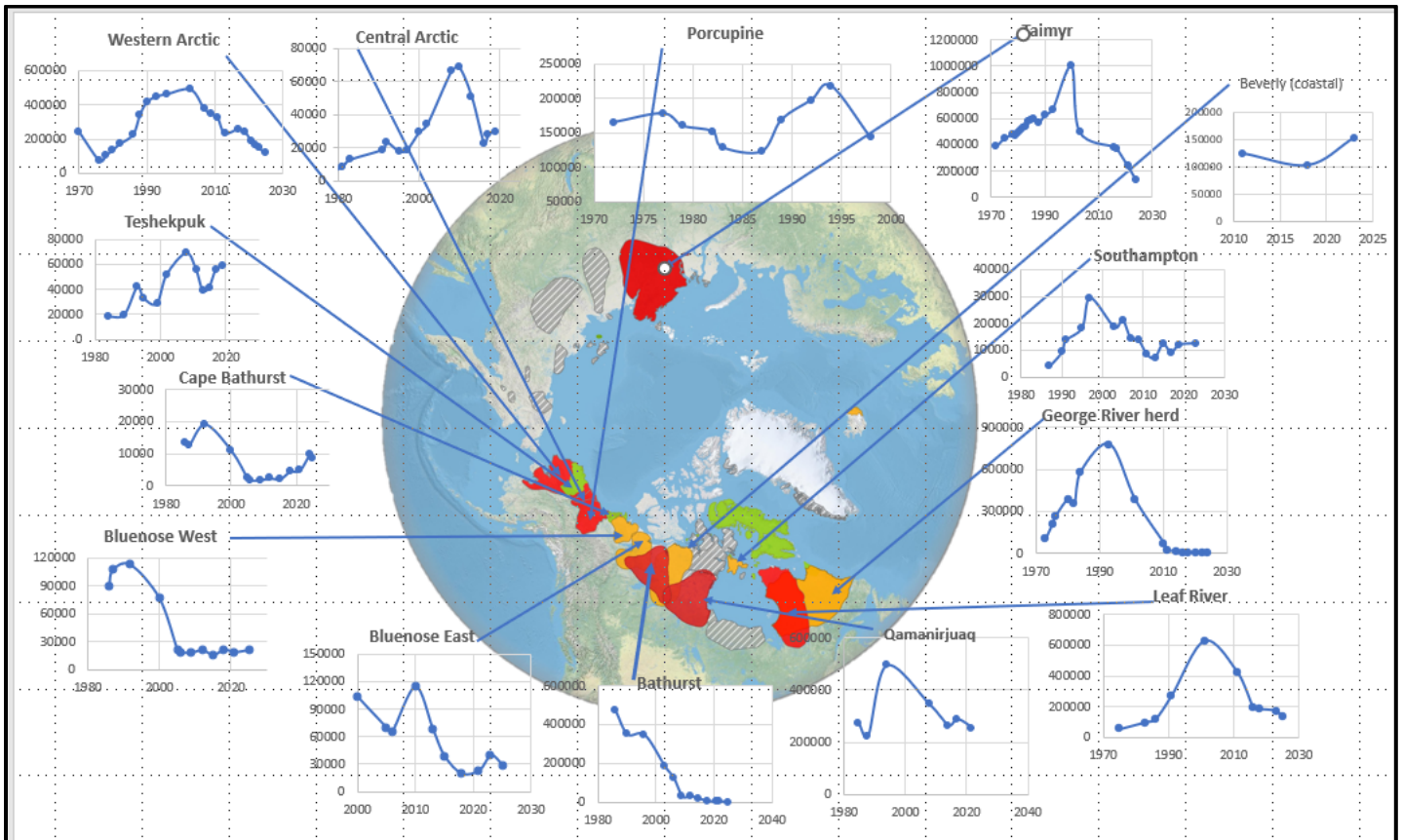


Figure 1. Global map and individual herd trends estimated for the previous 10 years

Table 1. The status and trend of migratory tundra caribou and wild reindeer (rates were not calculated when the most recent surveys were >3 generations ago or there were too few surveys).

	Status			Trend	
	Date	Most recent estimate	Standard Error	10-year rate of change (r)	Doubling /halving rate (years)
Western Arctic	2025	120,618	7706	-0.0998	-7
Central Arctic	2025	26,600		-0.0261	-27
Teshekpuk Lake	2022	61,593		0.0511	14
Porcupine	2025	143,000	12,784	-0.0305	-23
Cape Bathurst	2025	8,533	1,413	0.1345	5
Bluenose West	2025	20,476	6,727	0.0235	29
Bluenose East	2025	28,759	1484	0.0015	>100
Bathurst	2025	3,609	220	-0.155	-4
Beverly	2023	152,131	27,427	0.0145	48
Qamanirjuaq	2022	252,892	35,154	-0.078	-9
Southampton	2023	12,651	851	0.0152	46
Baffin Island	2025	48,000		0.2334	3
George River	2024	8,600		0.0096	72
Leaf River	2025	136,000		-0.0354	-20
Iceland	2023	5,106		-0.0176	-38
Kangerlussuaq	2018	60,469	4501		
Akia	2019	48,941	6390		
Ameralik	2019	19,503	4268		
Taimyr	2024	137,000		--0.1297	-5
Lena	2018	8,300			
Yana	2015	34,000			
Sundrun	2012	27,000			
Chukotka	2015	93,700			

The circumarctic climate is highly regional which is reflected in the rate of warming and its complex impacts on ecology¹. The pattern of declines in the Alaskan tundra herds and the rapid increases for regions such as Baffin Island may reflect how a warmer climate interacts in relatively warmer and cooler regions.

The trends were prepared from data supplied by wildlife management agencies and a source list is available on request.

Anne Gunn, Kyle Joly and Don Russell
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¹ Christensen, T. R., Fauchald, P., Arndal, M. F., eds. (2026). Climate change impacts on Arctic ecosystems and associated climate feedbacks. Lausanne: Frontiers Media SA. doi: 10.3389/978-2-8325-7601-4