

Woodland Caribou

Rangifer tarandus



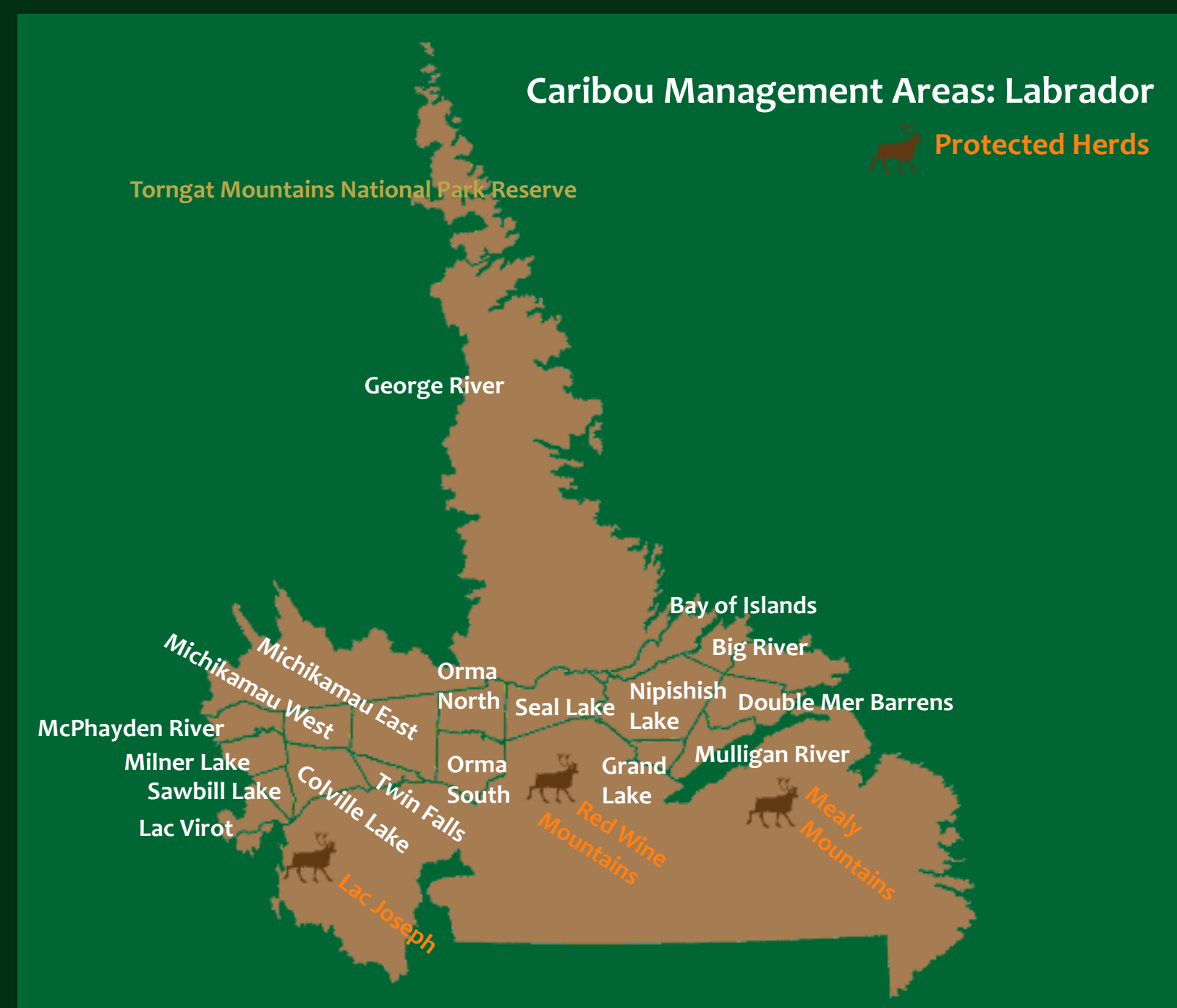
Photo: Ted Parody

An icon of our natural and cultural landscape

Canada is home to about 2.4 million caribou, medium-sized members of the deer (*Cervidae*) family, which includes four other native deer species: moose, elk, white-tailed deer, and mule deer. The word “caribou” is believed to be derived from the Mi’kmaq word “xalibu,” meaning “the one who paws.” All deer are ungulates – cloven-hoofed, cud-chewing animals – but unlike other deer species, both male and female caribou have antlers.

Caribou are well adapted to their environment. Their bodies are short and stocky to conserve heat, with long legs to help move through deep snow. Long, dense winter coats insulate against cold temperatures and high winds, and muzzles and tails are short and hairy. Ground and tree lichens are their primary winter food. Caribou breed in late fall, and a single calf is born between late May and early June. Calves are well developed at birth and are able to travel within a few hours.

Woodland caribou are native to both Newfoundland & Labrador and are part of the **Boreal Population** of caribou, which is sub-divided into two ecotypes:



Migratory forest-tundra ecotype: includes the Leaf River Herd, and the George River Herd, which migrates between forest and tundra in Quebec and Labrador. Estimates of George River caribou suggest the population is approximately 385,000 animals (2001 estimate).

Sedentary forest-dwelling ecotype: includes the Lac Joseph herd (pop. estimate 1,200), the Red Wine Mountains herd (100), and the Mealy Mountains herd (2,500). Labrador’s sedentary woodland caribou are listed as threatened under the provincial *Endangered Species Act* and the federal *Species at Risk Act*.

Due to the migratory nature of the George River herd, whose range overlaps that of the protected sedentary herds, a special management strategy is in place to reduce accidental harvest of animals from the protected herds during hunting season.

The Newfoundland population of woodland caribou also belongs to the sedentary forest-dwelling ecotype. In recent years Island population levels have declined significantly and are estimated at 32,000 animals (2008 estimate). In the late 1990s the total population of Island caribou exceeded 90,000 animals.

For more information, visit www.env.gov.nl.ca/env/wildlife or call (709) 637-2025



Photo: John Neville

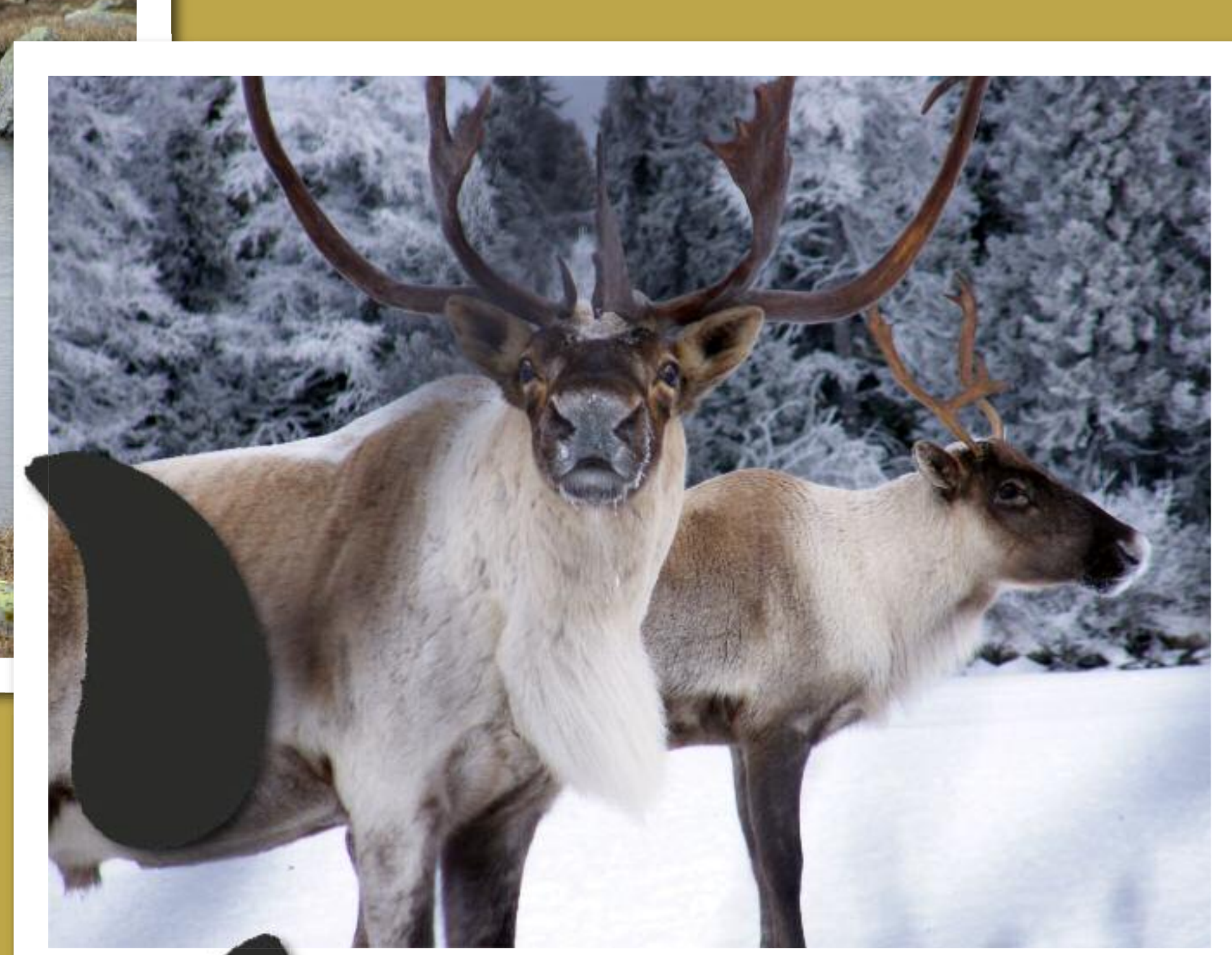


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Woodland caribou have been part of social, cultural and economic life in Newfoundland & Labrador for generations, and play an important role in our hunting heritage and nature-based tourism and outfitting industries.

The recent decline of insular Newfoundland’s caribou populations is being investigated and is linked to substantial predation, primarily by black bears and coyotes. Other factors are also being addressed in the Province’s five-year Caribou Strategy, including caribou health and body condition, habitat use and migration patterns.



Photo: Mike McGrath



Photo: Darren Barrett

Department of Environment & Conservation

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Newfoundland
Labrador