

Alaska Caribou Guide

Your Complete Guide to Alaska's Great Migrating Herds



Few wildlife spectacles rival the sight of a **caribou herd** stretching across the Alaska wilderness. Known for their incredible seasonal migrations and majestic antlers, caribou are one of the most recognizable animals of the Arctic and subarctic regions.

Alaska is home to hundreds of thousands of wild caribou living in several large herds that roam vast stretches of tundra and mountain landscapes. Unlike many other wildlife species, **both male and female caribou grow antlers**, making them unique among members of the deer family.

While they are less commonly seen on traditional Southeast Alaska cruises, travelers visiting Denali, Fairbanks, or Alaska's Interior have excellent opportunities to encounter these remarkable animals.

Quick Facts



Scientific Name: *Rangifer tarandus granti*

Height:

- About **4 to 5 feet** at the shoulder

Weight:

- Bulls: **350–600 pounds**
- Cows: **175–300 pounds**

Lifespan:

- 10–15 years in the wild

Diet:

- Lichens
- Mosses
- Grasses
- Willow
- Mushrooms
- Shrubs

Caribou are perfectly adapted to survive Alaska's harsh winters.

Where Can You See Caribou?



The best places to spot caribou include:

- Denali National Park
- Gates of the Arctic National Park
- Arctic National Wildlife Refuge
- Interior Alaska
- Brooks Range
- Fairbanks area
- Dalton Highway

Caribou are **rarely seen in Southeast Alaska**, so if your cruise includes a land tour into Alaska's Interior, your chances improve dramatically.

★ The Great Migration

Caribou are famous for their annual migrations.

Some Alaska herds travel **hundreds of miles every year**, making them among the longest-distance land migrants in North America.

They migrate to:

- Find fresh food
- Reach calving grounds
- Escape insects
- Avoid harsh winter conditions

Watching a migrating herd is one of Alaska's most incredible natural events.

🦌 Antlers Unlike Any Other

One of the most fascinating facts about caribou is that **both males and females grow antlers**.

- Bulls grow much larger antlers.
- Bulls usually shed them in late fall after the breeding season.
- Females often keep their antlers throughout the winter, giving them an advantage when competing for food.

No other deer species regularly has antlers on both sexes.

🚢 Can You See Caribou on an Alaska Cruise?

Caribou are **unlikely to be seen from a cruise ship** because they primarily live in Alaska's Interior and Arctic regions.

However, they are commonly spotted during:

- Denali CruiseTours
- Alaska Railroad journeys near Denali
- Interior Alaska motorcoach tours
- National park excursions

If you're adding a land tour before or after your cruise, keep your camera ready.

Photography Tips



For the best photographs:

- Use a telephoto lens.
- Include the surrounding landscape to capture the scale of Alaska's wilderness.
- Early morning and evening provide the best lighting.
- Photograph herds rather than focusing on a single animal.
- Be patient and avoid disturbing wildlife.

Best Time to See Caribou

May

Excellent.

Spring migration and calving season begin.

June

Excellent.

Calves are often visible.

July

Very good.

Caribou feed throughout the tundra.

August

Excellent.

Large herds remain active.

September

Outstanding.

Beautiful fall colors create stunning photography opportunities.

Interesting Behaviors

Caribou are constantly on the move.

They are known for:

- Traveling in large herds
- Swimming across rivers and lakes
- Running up to **50 mph**
- Using broad hooves as natural snowshoes during winter
- Digging through snow to reach food

Their large hooves also help them walk across soft tundra and marshy ground.

What to Bring

Bring:

- ✓ Binoculars
- ✓ Camera
- ✓ Telephoto lens
- ✓ Layered clothing
- ✓ Waterproof jacket
- ✓ Patience

Many sightings happen unexpectedly while traveling through Alaska's Interior.

Premium Travel Group Tip

If seeing caribou is high on your Alaska bucket list, consider booking a **CruiseTour that includes Denali National Park**. While Southeast Alaska cruises focus on whales, bears, and glaciers, Alaska's Interior opens the door to seeing wildlife like caribou, moose, wolves, and Dall sheep that are rarely found along the coast.

Continue Exploring Alaska

Continue planning your Alaska adventure with our other guides:

- Alaska Wildlife Guide
 - Moose Guide
 - Brown Bear Guide
 - Black Bear Guide
 - Mountain Goat Guide
 - Bald Eagle Guide
 - Dall Sheep Guide (*future guide*)
 - Denali National Park Guide
 - Alaska Railroad Experience Guide
 - Best Time to Visit Alaska
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Fun Facts

- Both **male and female** caribou grow antlers.
 - Caribou can run at speeds of **up to 50 mph**.
 - Their hooves change with the seasons, becoming softer in summer for better traction and harder in winter for gripping ice and snow.
 - Some Alaska herds migrate **hundreds of miles each year**.
 - Caribou are excellent swimmers and frequently cross rivers during migration.
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Why Are Caribou So Special?

Caribou symbolize the vast, untamed wilderness of Alaska. Their epic migrations, impressive endurance, and ability to thrive in some of North America's harshest environments make them one of the state's most remarkable wildlife species. Seeing a herd spread across the tundra is a powerful reminder of the scale and beauty of Alaska's wild landscapes.



Joe's Logbook

Caribou are one of those animals that many people don't think about until they start planning an Alaska land tour. They're not commonly seen along the Inside Passage, which makes spotting one in the wild even more special.

What amazes me most is how perfectly they're built for life in Alaska. They travel incredible distances every year, swim rivers without hesitation, and survive conditions that would challenge almost any other animal. It's no wonder they're one of the true symbols of the North.

If you're planning a CruiseTour that includes Denali or Interior Alaska, keep your binoculars close and your camera ready. You may not see a single caribou—you may see an entire herd stretching across the tundra. That's the kind of unforgettable wildlife moment that makes an Alaska vacation truly extraordinary.