

October 1, 2014 - No. 34

Bob Watson Photography

Reflecting The Spirit of Nature

NATURE - LANDSCAPES - WILDLIFE

Featured Photograph No. 1



Caribou, Denali National Park, Alaska

Hi Folks ,

The Featured Photograph above will appear in the 2016 calendar of the National Wildlife Federation, to be released in June 2015.

When this month's Newsletter is published, I'll be traveling and photographing the remote beauty of Michigan's Upper Peninsula. I hope to have Featured Photographs from that trip in my November 1st Newsletter.

Is Rudolph a Red Nosed Reindeer, or Caribou?

Well that depends - - it depends upon what you read or to whom you talk. By far, the majority of what you read states they are the same, except the reindeer is semi-domesticated. Most biologists say they are the same species, although there are different subspecies. A recent study in 2013 suggested that the migration patterns of these mammals from Europe and Asia were split during the last ice age. Due to this, some genetic differences did evolve over time, resulting in 7 subspecies. For sure, the caribou and reindeer are definitely "closely related cousins". By the way, all caribou in Europe, wild and domesticated, are called reindeer.

For purposes of this Newsletter, I'll refer to this mammal as the caribou. Caribou can be found in the northern regions of North America, Europe, Asia and Greenland. The only subspecies I've observed for the last 35 years is the Barren Ground Caribou found in Alaska.

Sometimes you hear, "during my next life, what would I like to be or come back as"? For a long time now, I've known that I wouldn't choose to come back as a caribou. Let me tell you why.

A caribou leads an extremely tormented life. Although its main natural predators are the bear and wolf, it's the insects that "drive them crazy". With the first warm days of summer, thick clouds of insects, mainly black flies and mosquitos, descend upon them and remain until the frosts of early fall. It's not uncommon to see caribou running and bucking wildly across the tundra to escape the insects. They often seek high windy areas to get some relief.

There are also two other flies in late summer that lay eggs on the caribou, often in their nose. The hatched larvae then feed on the caribou and live inside them through the winter.

Other Interesting Caribou Facts:

- 1) Both the male and female caribou grow antlers. It's very difficult to tell the difference between mature females (cows) and the young bulls.*
- 2) The caribou is well adapted to cooler climates with its hollow-hair fur that provides insulation in the winter and helps serve as flotation for swimming.*
- 3) Caribou can run 35-50 mph. Generally, their natural predators can only catch the sick and weak.*
- 4) An average male can weigh 200-240 lbs.*
- 5) The male caribou sheds his antlers after the mating season, but the female doesn't shed hers until early spring.*
- 6) Fully developed caribou antlers are covered in thick velvet, filled with blood vessels and are spongy in texture. The velvet sheds first, resulting in the antlers turning red with blood before changing to white.*

Featured Photography No. 2



Caribou in Autumn on the Tundra, Denali National Park, Alaska

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