

Farm to School Month – Week Two: Indigenous Food Focus

Caribou Day!!



Many thanks go out to Melissa Chlupach, Regional Healthcare Dietitian with NANA Management Services, for all her help with all the information she has provided me for each Wednesday this month celebrating Indigenous Foods We Eat! All information I have listed below is based on the materials she has passed along. Thank you, Melissa!!



CARIBOU

Let's learn about caribou today!!

Why take a whole day to look at caribou? Well, caribou have been eaten in Alaska for thousands of years and something THAT important needs to be shared.

The Roots of Caribou History

- Caribou have been hunted by Yup'ik, Iñupiaq, Dena'ina Athabascan, Tlingit, and Unangam Tunuu peoples.
- Considered an important food of the Alaska Native people, almost all the parts of the caribou are eaten, including the tongue

and bone marrow.

- Caribou in Alaska are distributed in 32 herds or populations. A herd uses a distinct calving area that is separate from the calving area of other herds, but different herds may mix on winter ranges.

Let's Move into the Science of Caribou

Pronunciation: kar uh boo

Yup'ik name: Tuntuq

Iñupiaq name: Tuttu

Dena'ina name: Ghenuy

Tlingit name: Watsíx

Unangam Tunuu name: It̕aya̕

Family: Cervidae

Genus: *Rangifer*

Species: *R. tarandus*

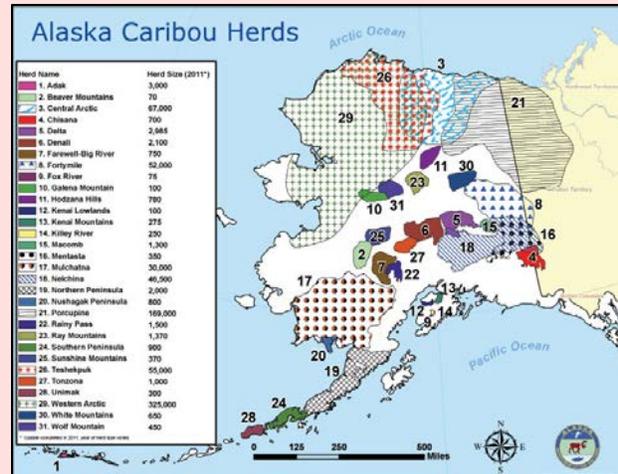


Caribou are the only member of the deer family (Cervidae) in which both sexes grow antlers. Antlers of adult bulls are large and massive; those of adult cows are much shorter and are usually more slender and irregular. In late fall, caribou are clove-brown with a white neck, rump, and feet and often have a white flank stripe. The hair of newborn calves ranges from dark, chocolate brown to reddish brown. Caribou have large, concave hoofs that spread widely to support the animal in snow and soft tundra. The feet also function as paddles when caribou swim.

Alaska has predominantly the barren-ground subspecies and one small herd of woodland caribou, the Chisana herd, which moves into Canada in the Wrangell-St. Elias area of Southcentral Alaska.

How and Where Do Caribou Live?

There are approximately 750,000 wild caribou in Alaska (including some herds that are shared by Alaska and Canada's Yukon Territory). The largest herds (as of 2011) are the Western Arctic Herd at about 325,000, the Porcupine Caribou Herd at about 169,000, the Central Arctic Herd at 67,000, the Fortymile Herd at 52,000 and the Teshekpuk Herd at about 55,000. Caribou are somewhat cyclic in number, and the timing of declines and increases, and the size to which herds grow is not very predictable. Although overhunting caused some herds to remain low in the past, today, varying weather patterns (climate), population density, predation by wolves and grizzly bears, and disease outbreaks determine whether most herds increase or decrease.



Herds numbering 350,000 animals can travel up to 900 miles during the summer from calving to wintering grounds. In Alaska, caribou prefer treeless tundra and mountains during all seasons, but many herds winter in the boreal forest (taiga). Calving areas are usually located in mountains or on open, coastal tundra. Caribou tend to calve in the same general areas year after year, but migration routes used for many years may suddenly be abandoned in favor of movements to new areas with more food. Changing movements can create problems for the Native people in Alaska and Canada who depend upon caribou for food.

Caribou movements are probably triggered by changing weather conditions, such as the onset of cold weather or snowstorms. Once they decide to migrate, caribou can travel up to 50 miles a day. Caribou apparently have a built in compass, like migratory birds, and can travel through areas that are unfamiliar to them to reach their calving grounds.

Reasons to Eat Caribou

3 oz of caribou provides:

- An excellent source of protein.
- An excellent source of iron.
- A heart friendly food low in saturated fat and sodium.

Some Great Caribou Facts

- The world population of caribou is about 5 million animals from North America, Russia, and Scandinavia.
- Caribou have hollow-hair fur that covers almost all of its body including its nose, and provides insulation in winter and flotation for swimming.
- Caribou can reach a running speed of 37-50 mph.
- Caribou is the only animal for which there were hunting songs, which came to the hunter as he awakened. People say that a caribou would “sing through” a person, either to let him know they were nearby or to reveal a taboo that has been broken.
- According to thirty-year veteran, David Shackleton, University of British Columbia emeritus professor, who has published widely on ungulates and other large mammals, the clicking sound made by caribou as they walk is caused by small tendons slipping over bone protuberances (sesamoid bones) in their feet.

Let's eat . . .

Grilled Caribou Kabobs

Serves 4

Ingredients	Amount
Caribou steak pieces, trimmed, cut into medium sized chunks	1 pound
Olive oil	¼ cup
Garlic	6 cloves
Red wine vinegar	¼ cup
Dried oregano	1 Tablespoon
Basil, fresh, chopped	2 Tablespoon
Salt	1 teaspoon
Pepper, ground	2 teaspoon
Zucchini, cut into 1 inch thick slices	2 cups
Cherry tomatoes	2 cups
Wooden skewers, soaked for 2 to 3 hours, or metal skewers	20

1. To make marinade, whisk olive oil, red wine vinegar, oregano, basil, salt and pepper together. Place caribou meat in a medium bowl, pour half of the marinade on the caribou meat and refrigerate for 1 to 2 hours. 30 minutes before you plan to cook the caribou, place vegetables in a separate bowl, pour remaining marinade on vegetables, cover, and refrigerate for 30 minutes.
2. Preheat outside grill to medium-high heat or inside grill pan to medium heat. Remove meat from marinade and place on skewers and do the same for the vegetables. Place kabobs on grill. For the caribou, cook for 12 to 15 minutes or until done, flipping to each side every 3 to 4 minutes. For vegetable kabobs, cook for 8 to 10 minutes, flipping halfway through.
3. Serve kabobs with a baked potato and glass of milk.

Yummy Goodness and Tasty Tips!!

- Caribou can be eaten boiled, roasted, grilled, or dried.
- Caribou has more protein and iron than the same amount of beef, and less of the unhealthy saturated fat.
- Gwich'in Athabascan creation story is about the Gwich'in people and the caribou separated from a single entity.
- The caribou liver, tongue, brain, blood, and kidneys are delicacies that add valuable nutrients and minerals to the human diet.
- The Alaska Department of Fish and Game's Division of Subsistence research shows that land mammals, like caribou, represent 20% of the state's subsistence harvest.
- There are more caribou than people in Alaska.
- Unlike other members of the deer family, bull caribou do not control a harem of cows. Instead, they control a space around themselves to prevent other bulls from breeding with females in their space.