

A Sighting of an Albino Caribou in Alaska and Review of North American Records

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An albino caribou (*Rangifer tarandus granti*) calf was observed among members of the Porcupine Herd on 2 July 1976 near the Kongakut River in northeastern Alaska (69°27'N, 141°30'W). It had snow-white fur and pink eyes. Hooves and muzzle were light-colored. The calf's behavior was similar to normally pigmented calves. This individual was the only albino observed in a group of 15,000 to 20,000 individuals. Observations were made for approximately two minutes at 300 m using a 45 power spotting scope. Eight other people observed the calf.

Albinism is the complete lack of melanin pigmentation rendering the hair white and eyes pink (Egoscue and Lewis, 1968; Howell and Mainoya, 1974; Searle, 1968). Some authors have described various stages of albinism depending on the degree of pigment loss (Braun and Blumberg, 1973; Gross, 1965; Pearson *et al.*, 1911-12). It has already been shown that this

TABLE 1. A Review of Albino Caribou References.

	Date Observed	True Albino	Age	Sex	Location	Remarks	Reference
1.	1886	?	?	?	Fort Chipewyan N.W.T.	Sent to Smithsonian Institution, Lost	MacFarlane, 1905; Fisher, pers. comm.
2.	~1896	?	Adult	F	Fort Smith N.W.T.	Not observed by author	Whitney, 1896
3.	~1894	No	Adult	M	Great Slave Lake N.W.T.	Head normal colored	Russell, 1898
4.	~1907	?	?	?	Hudson Bay	Traditional Tale	Boas, 1907
5.	1922	No	Yearling	?	Rae Isthmus N.W.T.	Yellowish-white skin with brown spots	Degerbøl and Freuchen, 1935
6.	1948-49	?	?	?	Northwest Territories	Observation of two individuals	Banfield, pers. comm.
7.	1948-49	Yes	Adult	M	Contwoyto Lake N.W.T.	Shot	Banfield, pers. comm.
8.	1949-1959	?	Adult	M	Northwest Territories	Observation	Kelsall, pers. comm.
9.	Before 1968	?	Adult	M	Fort Smith N.W.T.	Hide only	Kuyt, pers. comm.
10.	16 June 1960	Yes	Calf	?	Beverly Lake N.W.T.	Captured by C.W.S.	Kuyt, pers. comm.; Symington, 1965
11.	2 July 1976	Yes	Calf	?	Kongakut River Alaska	Observation by author	—

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interpretation is incorrect since mutations responsible for "partial albinos" are genetically unrelated to the albino series of alleles (Searle, 1968). It appears that only a small portion of animals that are described as albinos deserve that label (Gross, 1965).

A review of the literature revealed only three observations which could be positively identified as albino caribou (Table 1). Other observations could not be validated either due to the vagueness of the description (Boas, 1907; MacFarlane, 1905; Whitney, 1896), observations at distances too far to distinguish eye color (Banfield, pers. comm.; Kelsall, pers. comm.), or the observation of only the hide (Kuyt, pers. comm.).

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