

Great Caribou Calving Grounds In AEC Area For Exploration

"Those atomic energy people should see the tundra during caribou calving time before they decide to carve it up," Steve Wilson, photographer for Life Magazine said this week, in Fairbanks.

Wilson returned Thursday from shooting pictures of caribou babies and their mothers near the upper Utukok River in the Shaningarok Hills, of northwestern Alaska.

He estimated that between 100,000 and 150,000 caribou were roaming over a 15 to 25 square mile area.

"Why doesn't the AEC do its testing further north in the lake country," Wilson suggested. "There are very few animals up there because it's colder and more desolate."

Wilson, a marine biologist, pointed out that any disturb-

(Continued on page 7)

Calving Grounds

(Continued from page 1)

ance to the tundra takes 200 to 300 years to right itself.

"I can't predict what would happen if the AEC came in," Wilson said. "It would depend what time of year they were there. If it were during breeding time, the effect could be disastrous to caribou."

While up in caribou country, he chased down caribou babies less than an hour old to photograph.

"After that they can out-run you," he explained. "The babies are so cute, all eyes and legs. They charge around, having a ball. It's the nicest time of their whole lives. The weather is cool and the insects aren't there to bother them yet. It's the time before they realize what it's really like to be a caribou."

His photo essay is scheduled to appear at the end of the year. It will include migration, predators (including human), breeding and birth.

As with other stories Wilson read everything he could find about the caribou before getting started.

Because he does not like to work with telephoto lenses, he conceals himself so that he can get close to the animals. This time he could not get close enough to the main herd because soft ice made it too difficult for pilot Tony Bernhardt to land. So he would like to try birth photos again next spring if his editor will postpone the story.

Wilson will return to Alaska in October to photograph the fall migration of caribou, possibly near Anaktuvuk Pass.