Winter Range Encyclopedia Article

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Winter range is an area that animals use in winter for food and cover. Generally, winter range contains a food source and thermal cover that together maintain the organism's energy balance through the winter, as well as some type of protective cover from predators. Although some **species** of animals have special adaptations, such as hibernation, to survive winter climates, many must migrate from their summer ranges when conditions there become too harsh. Elk (*Cervus elaphus*) inhabiting mountainous regions, for example, often move from higher ground to lower in the fall, avoiding the early snow cover at higher elevations. Nothern populations of caribou or reindeer (*Rangifer tarandus*) often travel over 600 mi (965 km) between their summer ranges on the **tundra** and their winter ranges in northern woodlands. Still more extreme, the summer and winter ranges of some animals are located on different continents. North American birds known as **neotropical migrants** (including many species of songbirds) simply fly to Central or South America in the fall, inhabiting winter ranges many thousands of miles from their summer breeding grounds.