UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Izembek National Wildlife Refuge
P. O. Box 127
Cold Bay, Alaska 99571

Activity Report
Izembek National Wildlife Refuge, September 2025 – February 2026

CARIBOU

Federal Subsistence Hunt—Unit 9D (Southern Alaska Peninsula)

The previous Federal Subsistence Caribou Hunt in Unit 9D ran from August 1 through September 30, 2025, while the current season runs from November 15, 2025 through March 31, 2026. To date there were reports of 2 harvested caribou submitted to the Refuge from the participating communities.

Federal Subsistence Hunt – Unimak Unit 10

The latest Federal Subsistence Caribou Hunt on Unimak Island in Unit 10 runs from August 1 through September 30, 2025. To date there have not been any harvest reports submitted to the Refuge from the participating communities.

Annual Winter Caribou Population Survey

The annual winter caribou population survey of the Southern Alaska Peninsula and Unimak Caribou Herds was conducted February 8 and 9, 2026. Over 11 hours of flying, 577 caribou were counted within the Southern Alaska Peninsula, and 50 caribou were counted on Unimak Island. These surveys are intended to produce a minimum population count of the caribou herds and trends over time, rather than true numbers of caribou present. However, these numbers are significantly lower than the count of 3,408 for the Southern Alaska Peninsula Caribou Herd completed in 2024 and the 704 caribou counted in the Unimak Caribou Herd in summer 2025. These discrepancies are likely to be due to the fewer hours flown during this survey, seasonal changes in distribution of caribou on the landscape, and the difficulties of sighting caribou in the winter (Figure 1). Historically, this time of year, surveys could be completed during complete snow cover, making caribou and their tracks easier to count. In the past several years, snow cover has been inconsistent in mid-winter.

Figure 1. Caribou are easiest to spot in conditions of complete snow cover (left; 3 caribou) or absence of snow cover (center; 28 caribou) than in conditions of partial snow cover (right; 21 caribou). All three snow conditions were observed during 2026.

AVIAN

Brant Age Ratio Survey

The Izembek Brant Age Ratio Survey was conducted September 30 – October 17, 2025. Over the course of the survey, observers counted about 46,308 birds from 94 flocks, which was used to model an estimate of nesting success. The raw productivity estimate for 2025 indicated that approximately 25% of the fall staging population were first-year birds. This was below the 2024 estimate of 33%. Some variability in annual productivity is expected, and 2025's estimate is approximately level with the long-term average of approximately 25%.

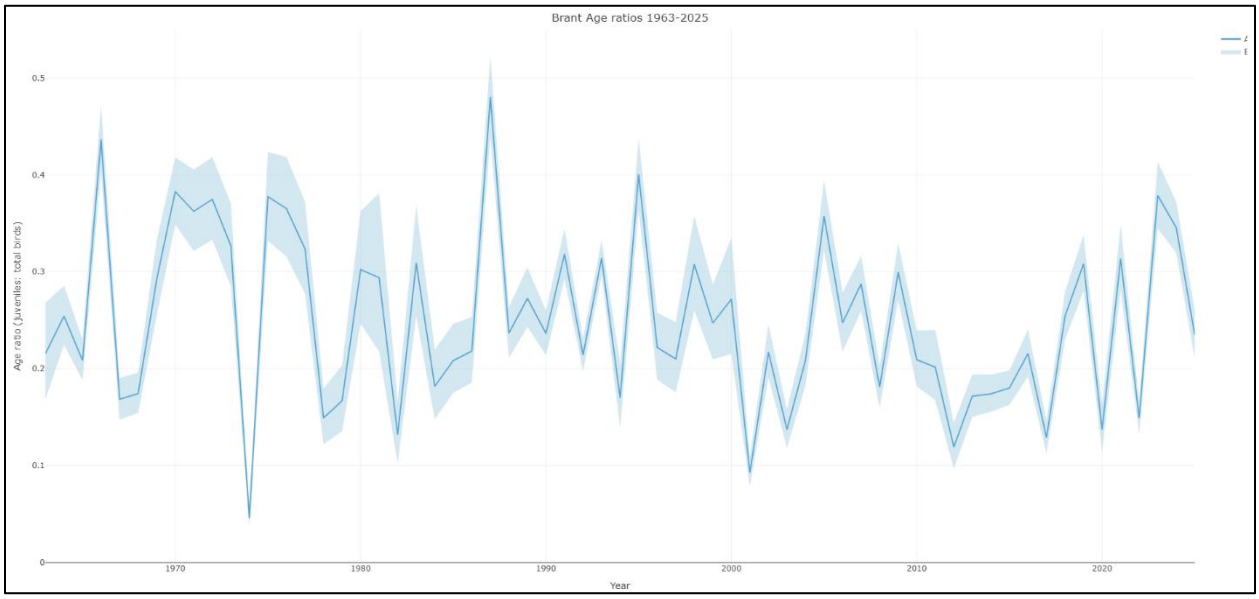

Figure 2. Graphic showing the Brant Age Ratio Survey results every year since the project's inception in 1963.

Brant Behavior and Disturbance Observations

Izembek initiated a new study documenting behavior of brant during fall staging at Izembek Lagoon. The study is aimed to understand how waterfowl spend their time at Izembek, how frequently staging birds are disturbed, and if levels of disturbance to staging waterfowl have changed since a similar study was conducted in the 1980's. The 2025 project was a pilot study to test field methods during research study design. During the months of September, October, and November, 6 observers recorded 288 hours of observations on brant. Data analysis of this large dataset is still underway.

Figure 3. Family group of brant displaying aggression towards other brant during brant behavioral studies in 2025.

HABITAT

Acoustic Monitoring

Izembek started a new study to obtain the baseline soundscape of the Refuge. Through collaborations with the National Park Service and the University of Alaska Fairbanks, the Refuge obtained acoustic monitoring equipment that was installed at several places on the Refuge to record sound levels and document wildlife use. During sampling periods in fall 2025, the baseline ambient sound level on the Refuge was 15.8 decibels, which is remarkably low for outdoor spaces. Data collection will continue through summer 2026.

Figure 4. Acoustic monitoring setup, with a weather meter (anemometer; left side) and a microphone (right side).