

# Deer and Bison

Artiodactyla



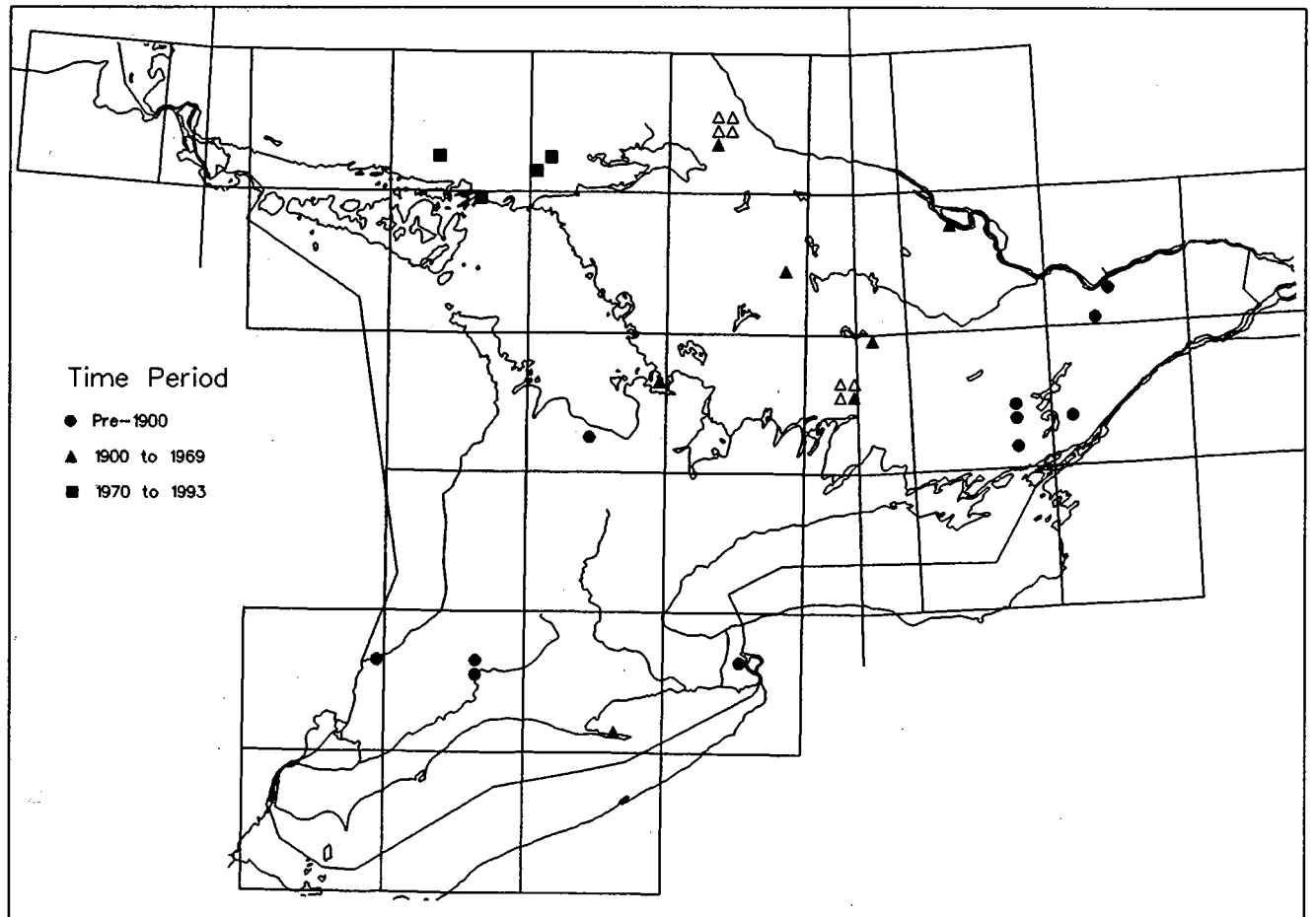
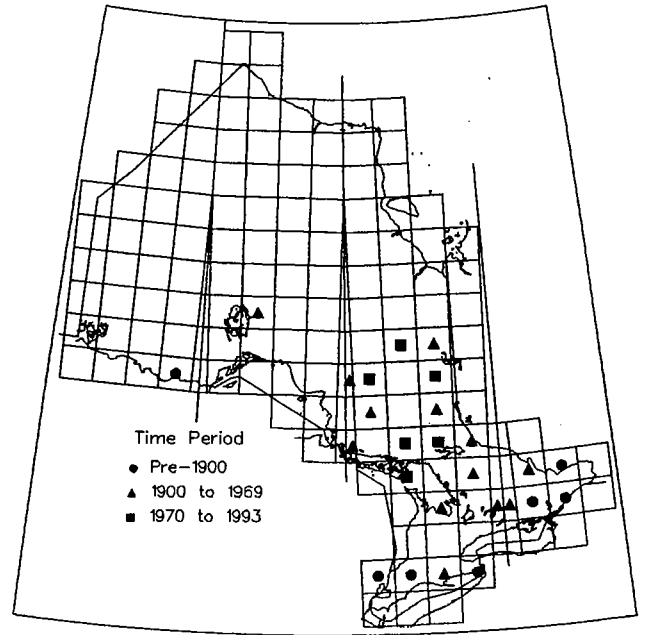
*Moose: Linda Shaw*

# Wapiti

*Cervus elaphus*

When Europeans first settled Canada, the eastern race of Wapiti or "Elk" (*C. e. canadensis*) were found in the Rainy River area and throughout southern Ontario north to Lake Nipissing. But by 1750, excessive hunting and habitat loss resulted in a province-wide decline. By 1850, the eastern race had been extirpated from Canada and eventually became extinct (Peterson 1966).

Beginning in 1897, Wapiti were reintroduced to Ontario using Wapiti from Manitoba (*C. e. manitobensis*). Early attempts failed, but between 1932 and 1947 several introductions at various locations were successful. However, in 1949, disaster struck again. The Large Liver Fluke (*Fascioloides magna*), a parasite of deer, was discovered in cattle near one of the release sites. Ensuing panic led to a province-wide extermination and by 1970 all of the Wapiti in Ontario had been eradicated except for a scarce few in the Burwash/French River area and the Chapleau Crown Game Preserve (Peterson 1966, Ranta 1979).

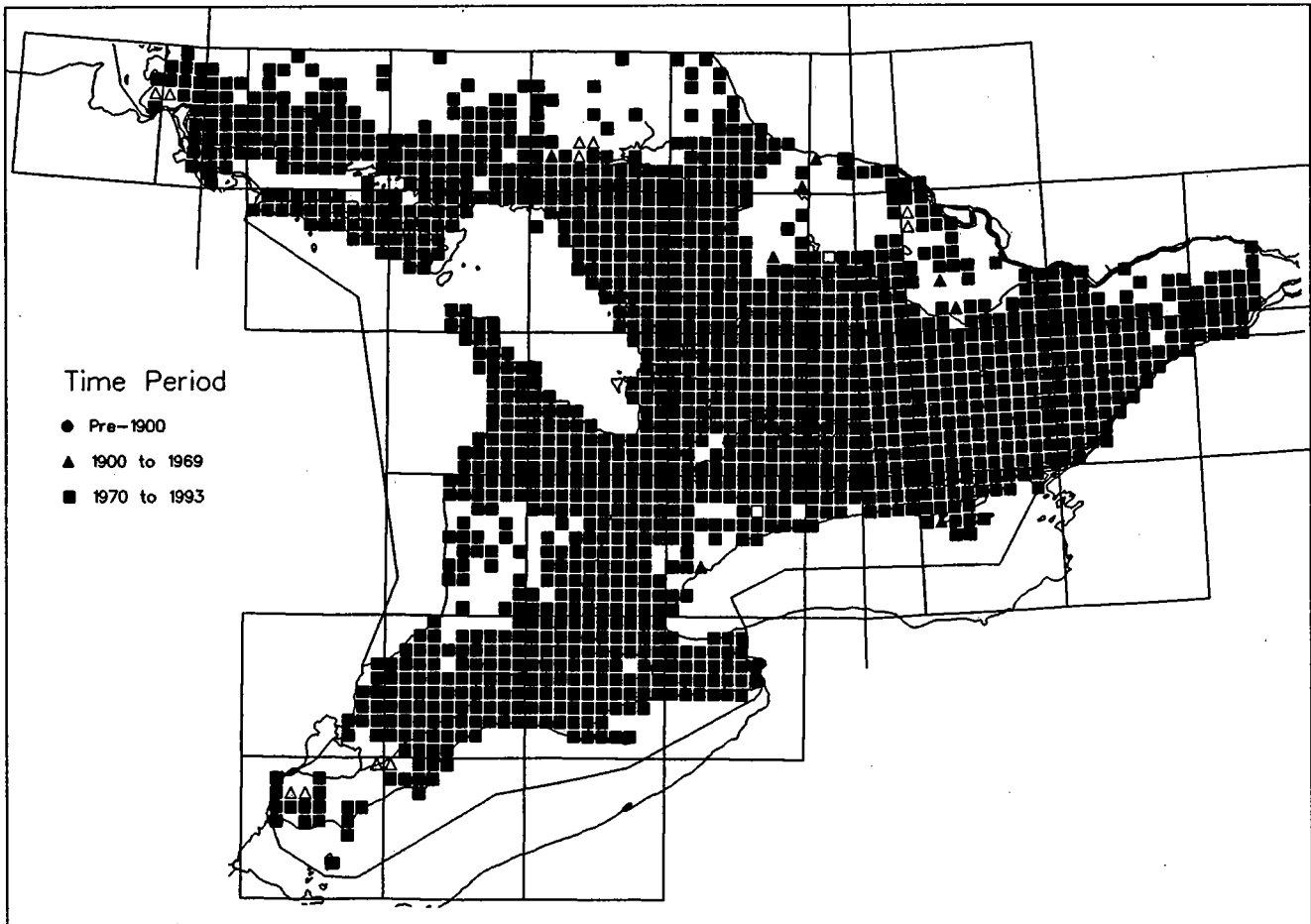
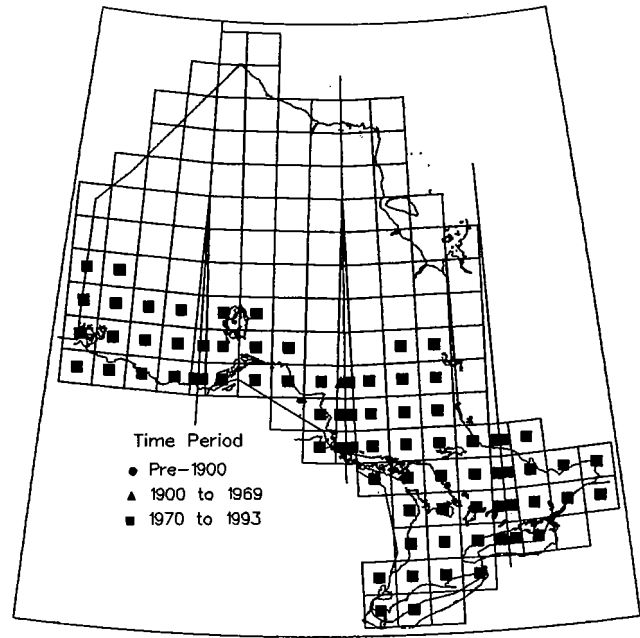


# White-tailed Deer

*Odocoileus virginianus*

The White-tailed Deer is the smallest and most commonly seen member of the deer family in Ontario. It can be found throughout North America from Mexico to a point mid-way between Lake Superior and James Bay. However, in Essex and parts of Kent and Lambton counties, intensive agriculture practices have eliminated woodlots, resulting in the decline of deer in these areas.

White-tailed Deer range is partly dependent on land-use practices. Extensive logging earlier this century resulted in a second-growth forest that allowed populations in the north to increase and spread (Peterson 1966).

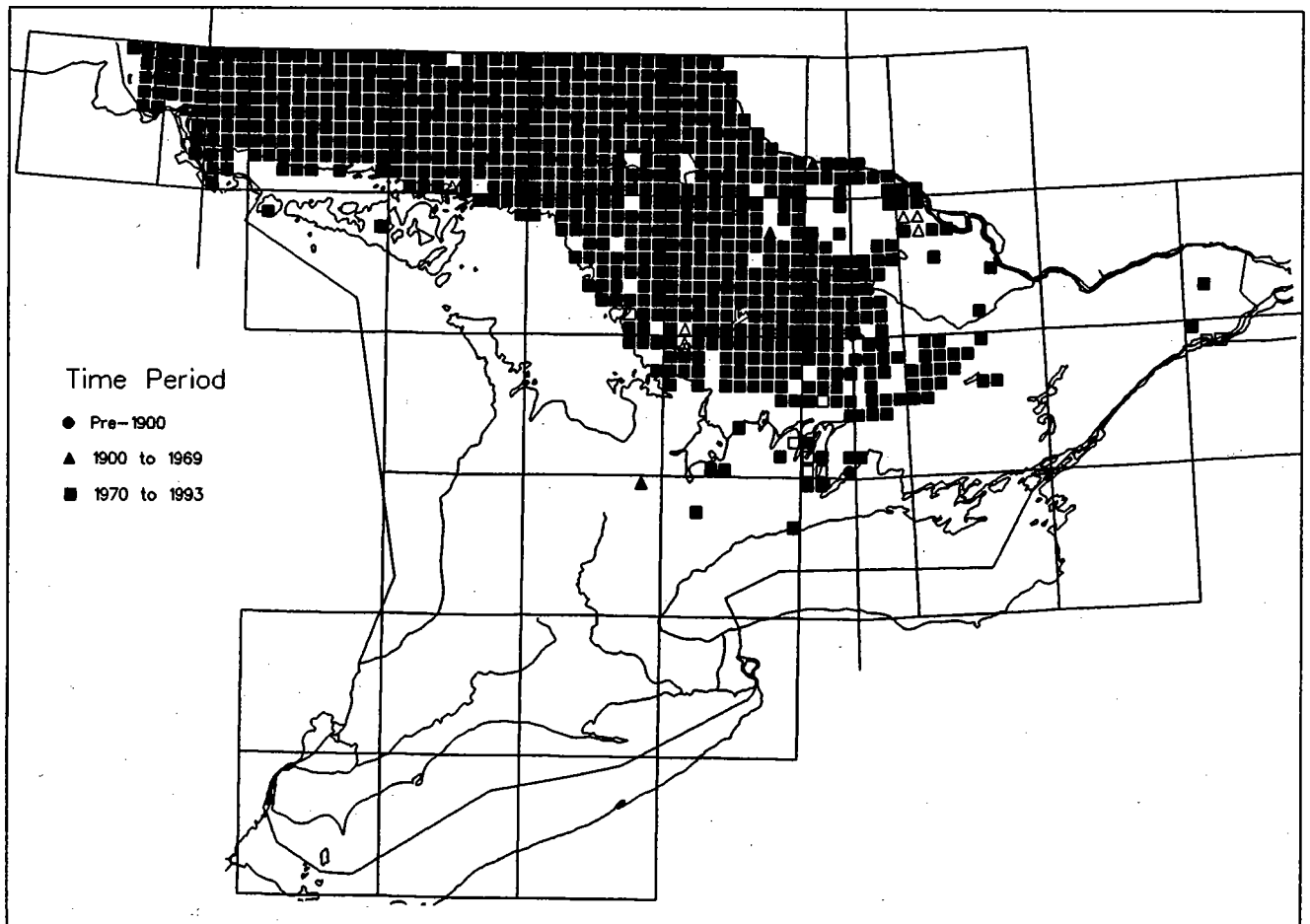
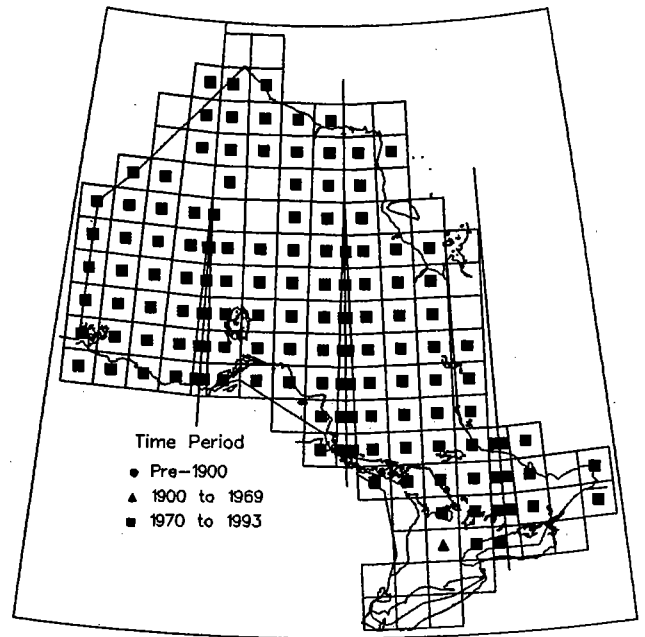


# Moose

*Alces alces*

The Moose is the most widely-distributed member of the deer family, living in Boreal Forest regions throughout the northern hemisphere. In Ontario, Moose are found in forested areas near lakes and wetlands north from the southern edge of the Canadian Shield to the tree line. Occasionally, Moose will wander south of their normal range off the Canadian Shield. Moose have been seen in Peterborough County and even as far south as Markham and Alliston. These records are not a reflection of the Moose's true range, but rather the extralimital movements of a few individuals.

During the last century, the distribution of the Moose has remained relatively stable with only a small reduction in the southernmost portion of its range. Early logging in the south created a second-growth forest more suited to the White-tailed Deer than to Moose. However, those second-growth forests are now maturing, resulting in higher numbers of Moose returning to southern areas.

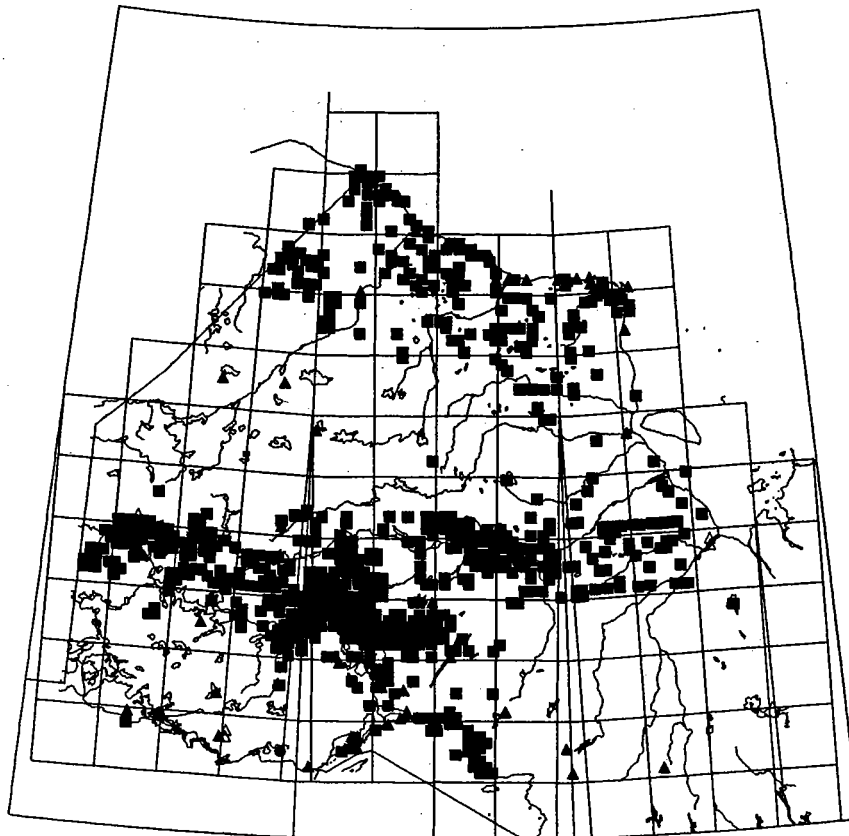
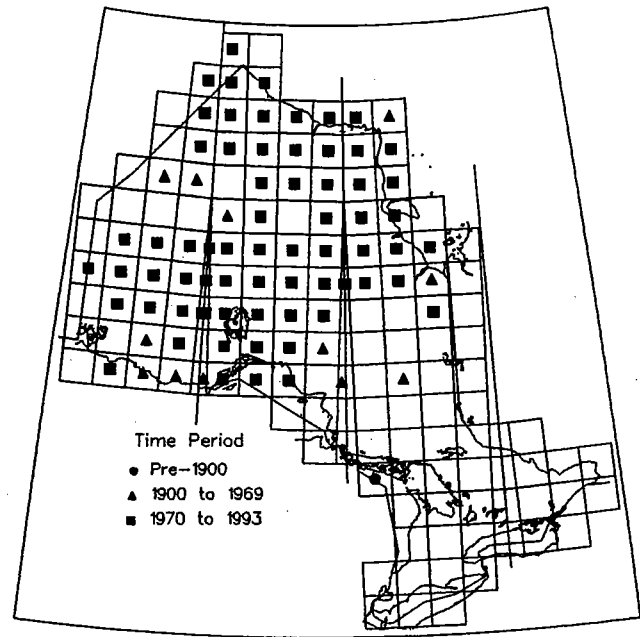


# Caribou

## *Rangifer tarandus*

Caribou once ranged across all territories and western provinces, into Ontario as far south as Lake Nipissing, across Quebec and into the Maritimes (Peterson 1966). Now in Ontario Caribou range north from 50° 20' latitude. Records from south of this line represent small remnant populations or historical finds (such as the antler found on Cockburn Island).

Caribou range in Ontario has decreased significantly since early settlement, because of a change in their habitat. Caribou prefer large expanses of mature, lichen-rich coniferous forest (particularly 80-120 year old jack pine), for use as winter habitat. Modern management practices aimed at maintaining such habitat focus on larger (10,000 ha) cuts to ensure large, uniformly-aged stands that are more suitable for Caribou than Moose. Historically, small-cut forest harvest techniques (50-100 ha) favoured Moose because of the abundant edge habitat created. High wolf populations supported by increased Moose numbers result in increased predation on the more vulnerable Caribou (OMNR 1993).

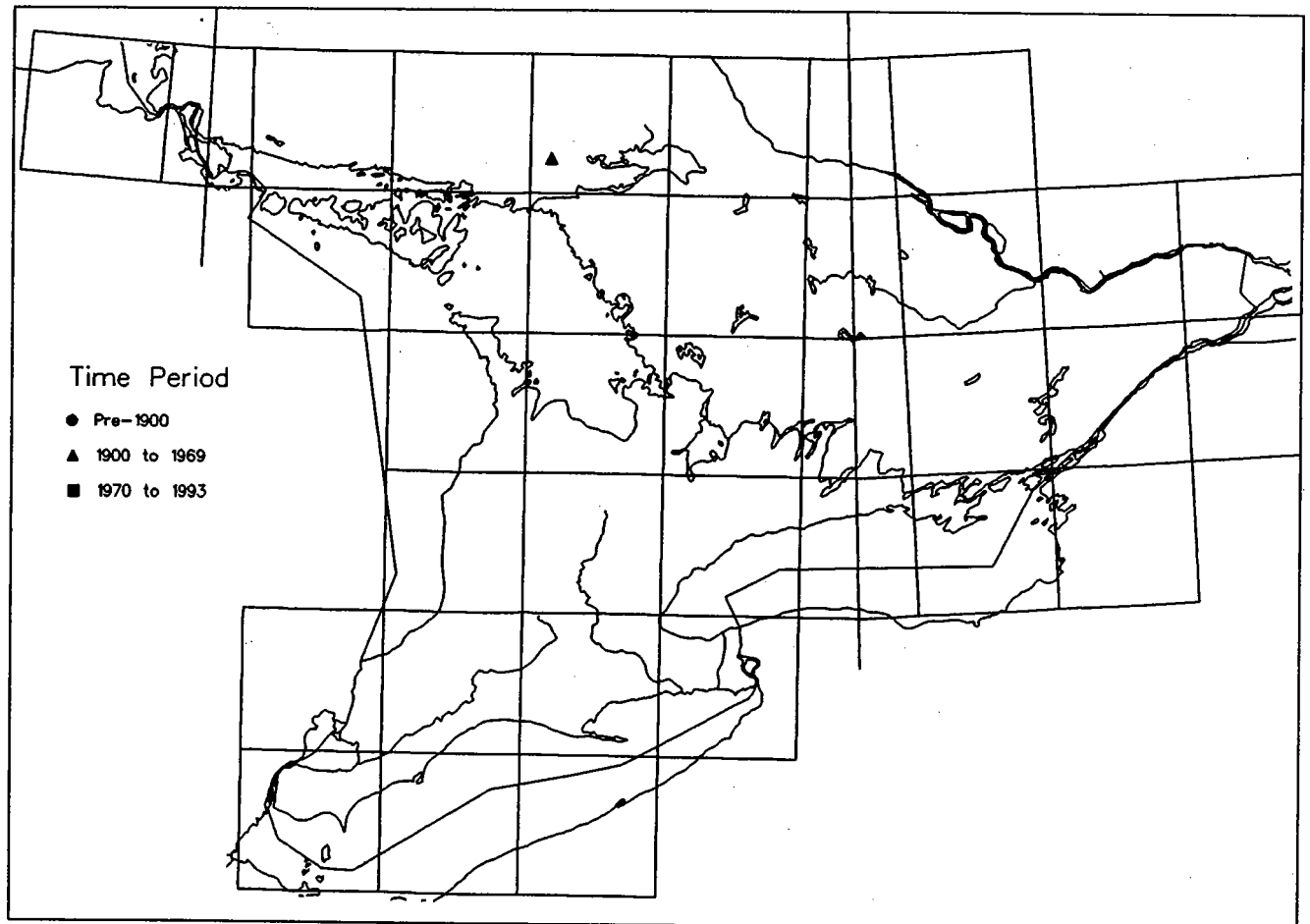
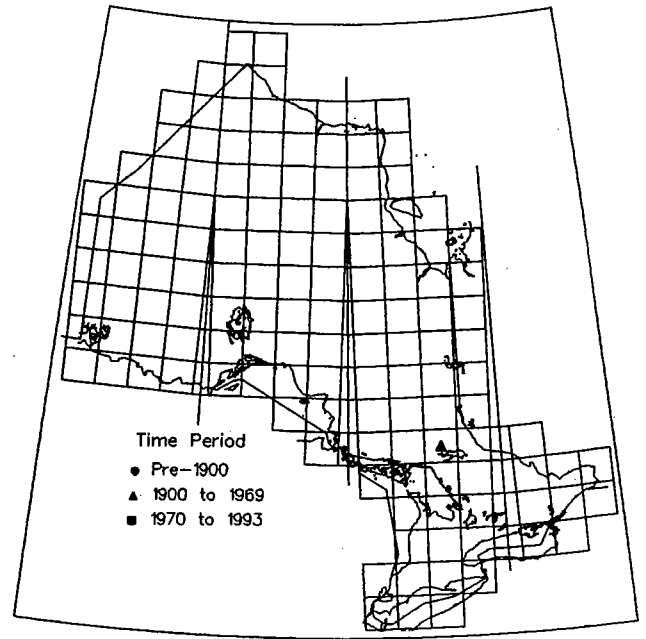


# Bison

*Bos bison*

Prior to European settlement, Bison ranged from Mexico to Great Slave Lake and from Washington to the Rocky Mountain states in herds totalling over 40 million animals. In Canada, they were found from eastern Manitoba to eastern British Columbia and northward to the Peace River district and Great Slave Lake region. By 1873, however, Bison herds had been reduced to only a few hundred animals. Since that time, government protection has allowed that number to increase to over 10 000 (Banfield 1974).

There is no evidence that Bison ever naturally occurred in Ontario or the rest of eastern Canada (Banfield 1974, Peterson 1966). However, in 1939, 40 Bison were released along with a number of Wapiti into an enclosure at the Burwash Prison Farm south of Sudbury. The Bison and Wapiti eventually escaped from the enclosure, but remained within the vicinity of the Burwash farm (Ranta 1979). At present, there is no evidence of any remaining Bison in the Burwash area, or anywhere else in Ontario.



# Exotics

## Black Rat

*Rattus rattus*

Just as the Norway Rat originated in Europe, so also did the Black Rat. However, the Black Rat has not become established in Ontario. In Canada, the Black Rat is associated with ports where it has strayed from the ships that carried it from Europe. In Ontario, the Black Rat has been recorded at only one site. Strathroy, where several of the rats were inadvertently introduced in 1927 (Peterson 1966).

Norway Rats are occasionally mistaken for Black Rats when captured near international ports. The two are, however, easily distinguishable. The Black Rat has a tail that is as long or longer than its head and body, whereas the tail of a Norway Rat is shorter than its head and body (Peterson 1966).

## Coypu

*Myocastor coypus*

The Coypu or Nutria is an exotic species that was brought to North America from southern South America to be farmed for fur. Coypu occasionally escaped from fur farms, creating the potential for feral populations. A few Coypu have been collected from the wild and the species was therefore included in the Mammal Atlas survey. However, there have been no recent Ontario records of Coypu, and it is unlikely that there are any feral Coypu left in the province.

The distribution of Coypu records in Ontario is consistent with the distribution of Coypu farms rather than any natural, distribution.

## Domestic Ferret

*Mustela putorius*

The Domestic Ferret is not native to Ontario and it is unlikely that any populations exist within the province. It is more likely that all ferrets found in the province are recent escapees or have been released by owners who no longer want them. Mammal Atlas data don't show any natural distribution for the ferret, but rather indicate those areas where ferrets have escaped or were released. There is no evidence that ferrets ever breed and produce litters in the wild in Ontario or that these animals survive for any length of time.

Historically, Domestic Ferrets were brought to Ontario to help hunters catch rabbits. A ferret would be placed in the burrow of an Eastern Cottontail and the resulting chase would bring the rabbit to the surface. More recently, ferrets have been kept as pets, which has increased the number of animals escaping or being intentionally released.