



ELK

Cervus elephus



The elk is the second largest member of the deer family. Elk range in color from dark brown in winter to tan in summer. They have a characteristic light-colored rump. The head, neck, belly, and legs are darker than the back and sides. Elk are social animals that are found in herds of up to 400 individuals. During the breeding season, dominant males maintain harems of up to six females and their offspring. They defend those females and restrict access to them by other males. Males advertise their status and attract females through bugling.



SPECIES QUICK FACTS

SIZE

Elk are six to nine feet in length, with a shoulder height of four to five feet.

WEIGHT

Adult male elk weigh between 600 and 1,000 pounds. Female elk average between 450 and 600 pounds.

FOOD HABITS

Elk are grazers that typically eat grasses and other green plants. During the winter they also browse on woody growth.

HABITAT

Elk are typically found in open forested areas.

GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION

Elk are found throughout the western United States and Canada. A small population of elk has been reintroduced into the northern lower peninsula of Michigan. Elk are also found in Eurasia, where they are known as the red deer.

FUN FACT

The elk is also known as the wapiti, which is the Shawnee word for white rump.