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Elk; Understaning the Basics by Gina Matson

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Elk are popular animals sought after mainly due to their large size. They are 6 to 9 feet in length with a tail that can be anywhere from 4 1/2 to 7 inches. Their shoulder height is generally 4 to 5 feet high and they weigh between 400 to 1000 pounds. There antlers may span up to 5 feet and weigh up to 30 pounds. They grow a new set of antlers each year. These antlers may grow at a rate of .98 inches per day. Bull elk may have up to eight or more tines on each antler.

Elk are primarily nocturnal, but are especially active in the dawn and the dusk. They are now found in only 12 out of the fifty states. A male elk is called a bull, a female is called a cow, and a baby is called a calf. Fun fact: Elk are known as red deer in Europe, and moose are known as elk.

In Washington and Oregon there are two kind of Elk: Rocky Mountain Elk, who dwell on the eastern slopes of the Cascades, and Roosevelt or Olympic Elk, who dwell on the western slopes. Elk are typically found in upland forests and grasslands, ranging into coniferous forests and alpine tundra. They are found at higher elevations in the spring and lower elevations in the fall.

Elk are members of the deer family, as are moose. They are grazers who eat mainly grass but are adaptable to other plant food, such as bark and leaves, as well as ruminants who chew cud to get the most nutrients possible out of the tough, hard to digest plant material, such as grass. Elk consume about twenty pounds of food a day. They have a tendency to feed in the early morning and in the evening, seeking shelter while digesting their food.

They are herd animals as well. Young males stay in the herd with their mothers for the first year. Older males form small "bachelor herds" with the other males until the rut in which they become solitary. The cow's stay in smaller groups with the young and typically one bull elk. Each cow will typically have one calf. A newborn calf can weigh up to thirty five pounds. Calves are usually born in late May to early June. When the cow is with her calf they are very dangerous and should be avoided.

The elk's coat varies in color from a light tan to a deep brown. Their legs and neck are usually darker than their body. A calf is typically born spotted. During the fall, elk grow a thicker coat to help insulate for winter. They are known to rub against trees and other objects to remove their extra winter coating from their bodies in the early summer.

During the rut, or mating season bulls expose these mating behaviors: bugling, which is a loud series of vocalizations and grunts, posturing, and antler wrestling (also known as sparring). These behaviors are exposed to show dominance over the other males and to lure the cows into their haven.

When alarmed elk will raise their head high, open eyes wide, move stiffly while rotating their ears to listen. As excellent runners these animals can run at speed up to 35 miles per hour, which helps them to out run their predators.

Elk are also known as wapiti. The name Wapiti is from the Shawnee & Cree word Waapti, meaning white rump. Wapiti is as common a name to identify this animal, as elk. In some cultures the elk is revered as a spiritual force. Elk are very magnificent animals and are a pleasure to watch, hunt, and to learn about.

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Relationships and family are the top priorities in our lives. My husband and I are avid outdoor enthusiasts. We spend most of our free time with our family enjoying what nature has to offer, such as hunting, fishing, hiking and camping. Because of our love for these activities we as a family enjoy, Oak Point Hunting Knives and Optics was born to be able to share with others some of the fun which we enjoy. Visit us at: www.oakpointhuntingknives-optics.com

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