

2.8 Roosevelt Elk & Rocky Mountain Elk (*Cervus elaphus nelsoni*, *Cervus elaphus roosevelti*)

Appearance and Size

Elk have distinct winter and summer coats. In winter, the head, neck, and legs are dark brown, and the sides and back are a much lighter gray-brown. Adult males (bulls) tend to have a lighter, creamier body colour than adult females (cows). In summer, the coat is a rich



(Photo: Dave Dickson, ICBC)

reddish-brown, with little or no undercoat. Both sexes have heavy dark manes and a yellowish-white rump patch bordered by a dark brown or black stripe. Adult bull Elk stand about 140 cm high at the shoulder and weigh 265 kg to 410 kg. Cows stand about 130 cm high and weigh 190 kg to 270 kg. Roosevelt Elk and Rocky Mountain Elk look quite similar, but Roosevelt Elk are slightly larger and darker. Mature bull Elk have

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rich-brown antlers, ranging in length from 110 cm to 160 cm, with ivory tips and usually five other pointed tines. Yearling bulls tend to have unbranched spike antlers.

Elk are social animals. Up to 20 or more cows, calves, and yearlings live in groups that remain apart from the smaller groups of bulls, except during the autumn mating (rutting) period. As the mid-September rutting period approaches, bull Elk become more active and aggressive. They seek out the cow groups and establish



(Photo: J. Schmidt, US National Park Service)



(Photo: US National Park Service)

harems of several cows that they jealously herd and guard. Most cows are bred from mid to late September. Elk have a gestation period of eight months. Calves are born in late May and early June. Single births are most common and twins are rare. While Elk can live as long as 20 years, most die by age 10 or 12.

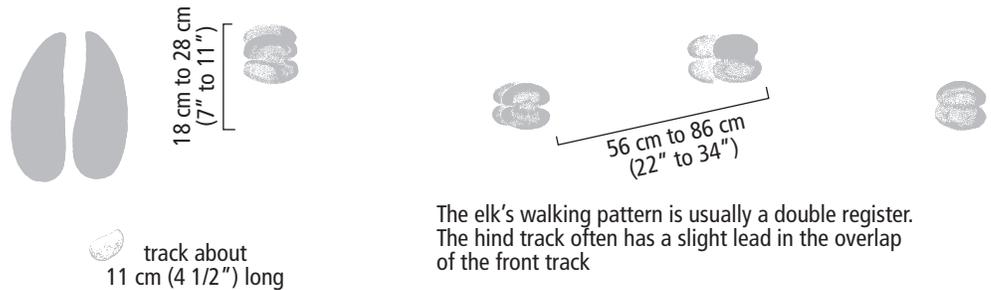


(Photo: BC Parks)

Abundance and Distribution

Elk usually live in mountainous areas. They occur both in the dense coastal old-growth rainforests and grassy interior valleys with scattered tree cover, keeping to areas where winter snows remain shallow. (Map 2.8) There are about 45,000 Rocky Mountain Elk in the British Columbia interior. About 15,000 occur in northern BC, 25,000 in the Kootenay region and 1000 in the Thompson-Okanagan area. A few hundred occur in other scattered herds. Elk are most numerous in the east and west Kootenay regions north to about Golden and west to Grand Forks. Native populations also occur along the east slope of the Rockies and adjacent foothills from the Wapiti River drainage to the Liard River, with a major concentration in the Muskwa and Tuchodi River areas. Since 1917, transplants – some from outside the province – have altered Elk distribution, supplementing some existing populations and resulting in new herds in several locations: southern Vancouver Island, the Queen Charlotte Islands, the Sechelt Peninsula, Powell River, Princeton, Lytton, Okanagan Lake, Granby River, Lower Arrow Lake, Williston Lake, and the Kechika River valley. About 3,000 to 3,500 Roosevelt Elk are located on Vancouver Island, with small herds in Phillips Arm, Sechelt and Powell River.

Text and map adapted from: British Columbia Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks, 2000b.



Adapted from: McDougall (1997); and Sheldon and Hartson (1999).



(Photo: BC Ministry of Transportation)

Characteristic Features



(Photo: Leonard Sielecki, BCMoT)



(Photo: Leonard Sielecki, BCMoT)

Map 2.8

