

ELK

IN THE

NC Smokies



ELK FACTS



- Scientific Name: Cervus Elaphus. Elk are part of the deer family, which includes moose, caribou, mule deer and white-tailed deer.
- There are four subspecies of elk in the United States: Tule elk in California; Roosevelt elk along the Pacific Coast; Manitoban elk in Canada, and transplanted to Tennessee and North Carolina, with Rocky Mountain elk found elsewhere in the lower 48 states and parts of Canada.
- The elk in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park and on the Cherokee Tribal Lands are Manitoban elk that were transplanted from Alberta, Canada.
- Newborn calves weigh 35 pounds. Female elk, called cows, weigh around 500 pounds. Male elk are called bulls and weigh about 700 pounds. Adults are 6 ½ feet long from nose to tail and stand 4 ½ feet tall at the shoulder.
- Bull elk grow and shed a new set of antlers every year. New growth begins around May when the antlers are covered in fuzzy skin called velvet. The antlers harden by late summer and the velvet peels away. By September, antlers are solid bone and can weigh up to 40 pounds on a mature bull.
- Cow elk give birth to one calf every year, with twins being very rare. Calves are born spotted and scentless.
- The mating call of bulls is called a bugle and can be heard during the breeding season, called the rut, which runs from late August through October.
- The best time to see elk is early morning and late afternoon. Always view elk from a distance using binoculars or a spotting scope to view up-close. If the elk becomes alert or nervous and begins to move away – you are too close!

Elk were once abundant throughout the United States. Habitat loss wiped out eastern elk herds. In 2001, the National Park Service and other partners joined together to reintroduce elk to the Cataloochee Valley. The initial 52 elk that were released



Safety

When elk are present, federal regulations require that you remain at least 150 feet away and at a distance that does not disturb them. Failure to do so can result in fines and/or arrest.

Viewing the Elk

Most elk are located in the Cataloochee Valley area in the southeastern section of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. As the elk have begun to migrate out of the park area you can frequently see elk in and around Maggie Valley.

ted States, but by the mid-1800's, overhunting and
01, the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, the National
er to restore wild elk to the Smoky Mountains in the
ed have grown to a herd of more than 100.



– FREQUENT ELK SIGHTINGS

What to Expect

Cataloochee is a remote area of Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Once you leave US 276, there is no gas, food, or other commercial services available to you. In the valley there are some historic structures and exhibits, trailheads leading to over 800 miles of trails, camping, and the opportunity to see wildlife including the reintroduced elk herd. The herd is strong and growing. The best time to view the elk is approximately two hours before sunset.

Directions

From I-40: Take exit 20 towards Maggie Valley. After ¼ mile, turn right on Cove Creek Road. Go about 13 miles to the Cataloochee Valley. The road turns into a narrow dirt road and intersects a paved road. Follow directional signs for "Cataloochee Camp Ground."

The easiest way to reach Cataloochee Valley is to take 276 North (Jonathan Creek Road) off Highway 19 in Maggie Valley. Go about 6 miles and turn left onto Cove Creek Road, the last left turn before coming to I-40 intersection. Travel on Cove Creek Road into Cataloochee Valley (see below).

**Cove Creek Road is a steep, ten-mile, narrow, curving mountain road. There is a three-mile unpaved section leading up and over Cove Creek Gap, and then winding down the other side of the mountain. Early settlers built this road by hand in the 1800s and called it Cataloochee Turnpike. This graveled section remains as a vital reminder of Cataloochee's history and a tribute to its builders. When you again reach pavement, turn left and enjoy your easy descent into the valley.*



Seasonal

CALVING SEASON: LATE SPRING

Most of the calves in Cataloochee are born in June. The cows hide their calves in the high grass. For safety and to avoid disturbing the calves, visitors should stay out of the fields. Cows can be aggressive in protecting their young. By late June, visitors can often see the calves up and moving with the herd.

GROWING SEASON: SUMMER

The herd can often be seen grazing in the fields. Bulls are "in velvet," rapidly growing new antlers. The calves are growing quickly and will gain as much as 140 pounds by winter.

THE RUT: FALL

The mating season for elk is called the rut, which occurs from mid-September through the end of October. Large bulls bugle and fight for domination and the right to breed with the cows. This can be a dangerous time for visitors as the bulls can be aggressive with unpredictable behavior. For your protection, please remain on the roadway and near your vehicle during the rut.

WINTER IN CATALOOCHEE

Winter is a quiet time in the valley. The elk herd retreats to the woods and may not be seen in the fields for weeks. The road becomes treacherous with snow. The road will often be closed when snow is on the peaks around Jonathan Valley.



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800-334-9036

Friends of the Smokies and Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation provided information contained in this brochure.