

## Life History

Elk or *wapiti* (which means “white rump” in the Shawnee language) are members of the deer family, closely related to moose and white-tailed deer. Adult elk weigh between 500 and 900 pounds and are 4 ½ to 5 feet tall at the shoulder.

Elk have distinct summer and winter coats. In the winter an elk’s head, neck and legs are dark brown, while its sides and back are much lighter. Their summer coat is a deep reddish brown color. Both sexes have heavy dark manes extending to the brisket and a yellowish rump patch.

Each year male elk grow antlers used for dominance displays and combat. These antlers can weigh up to 40 pounds when bulls reach maturity at five years.

Elk are herbivorous, and on the Clam Lake elk range, consume a wide variety of grasses, forbs, shrub and seedling leaves, and woody



Steve Burns



Wisconsin DNR

browse. Natural meadows, forest openings, and forest clearcuts provide attractive elk foraging areas. Elk can sometimes be seen feeding in these openings at dawn and dusk.

Elk calves, born in late May and early June, weigh about 35 pounds. A cow remains isolated with her single calf for a few weeks, after which she rejoins a nursery group. These groups will generally stay together until the next calving season.

Mature bulls typically spend the summer in small groups. In August, bulls polish their antlers and are ready for the breeding season or “rut,” which peaks in late September and ends in early October. Bulls make a low whistling sound or “bugle” during this time to challenge other bulls, maintain their harems and identify their territory.

After the rut, elk often form large groups that may remain loosely associated all winter near good feeding areas. About five times the size of deer, elk are less restricted by heavy snow. However, like deer, they often utilize evergreen forests for cover during periods of winter cold and deep snow.

## Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation

The mission of the Elk Foundation is to ensure the future of elk, other wildlife and their habitat.

In support of this mission, the Elk Foundation is committed to:

- ♦ Conserving, restoring and enhancing natural habitats;
- ♦ Promoting the sound management of wild, free-ranging elk, which may be hunted or otherwise enjoyed;
- ♦ Fostering cooperation among federal, state and private organizations and individuals in wildlife management and habitat conservation; and
- ♦ Educating members and the public about habitat conservation, the value of hunting, hunting ethics and wildlife management.

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Printed by the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation in cooperation with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources,



University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point,  
and USDA Forest Service.

# Elk in Wisconsin



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