



# Elk

## *Cervus elaphus*

**Description:** Elk are large mammals that resemble moose and deer, they are called wapiti by Native Americans which means "light colored deer". A bull elk can have antlers that reach 4 feet over their head, making them a towering 9 feet tall. The cows do not have antlers and are generally slightly smaller than the bulls.



**Habitat:** Elk are found from grassy plains to snowy mountains. They graze in rich grasslands and use the mountains as protection for their young.

**Range:** Elk are found in North America from north Texas all the way to Alaska.



**Lifespan:** in the wild Elk have an average lifespan of 8-12 years and will live longer in captivity.

**Natural Diet:** Elk are herbivores and feed off the grasses and vegetation they find.

**Zoo Diet:** At the zoo our elk are fed alfalfa and coastal hay while also grazing on the grass in the exhibit.

**Behavior:** Elk are generally shy of people and males can become very aggressive in breeding season. During the rut, cows form small groups or harems that are controlled by a dominant bull. For the remainder of the year, cows, yearlings and calves form herds of 25 or more animals, while bulls form smaller bachelor herds.

**Reproduction:** In early Summer the elk migrate to the mountains where the cows will give birth to a single calf which can stand on its own after only 20 minutes.

**Conservation Status:** Least concern