



Tule elk bachelor herd. Photo by Frederic Silva.

Elk Management: A Cooperative Effort

Many agencies are involved in managing and protecting California's elk. The Department of Fish and Game is responsible for managing the animals, while the US Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management manage much of the land that supports elk. Private, nonprofit organizations like the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation raise money to assist state and federal agencies in these efforts.

Tule elk management is a conservation success story. As of 2004, the state-wide population had increased to approximately 3,700 tule elk in 22 different herds. Several herds can now sustain a strictly controlled harvest to keep animals in balance with their habitat. Whether a herd can be hunted depends on annual calf survival, natural adult mortality (predation, disease, etc.) and habitat quality and quantity.

California's elk are recovering. In less than 75 years, pioneers nearly exterminated elk from the state and now, because of careful management, these magnificent animals will survive into a new century.

Recreational Opportunities

Elk provide many opportunities for recreational enjoyment, including viewing, natural history study, photography and hunting. The key to appreciating California's elk is personally experiencing the habitat in which elk and other wildlife live. From butterflies to bald eagles, California's elk habitat supports an immense variety of animals and plants which can still be enjoyed even if you don't spot the wily elk. Experience the mystique and majesty surrounding this great animal next time you enter California's elk country.

Places to View Elk in California	
Grizzly Island Wildlife Area Near Fairfield, Solano County (707) 425-3828	Tule elk
Owens Valley Near Bishop, Mono County (760) 872-1171	Tule elk
Tule Elk Preserve Tupman, Kern County (661) 764-6881	Tule elk
Prairie Creek Redwoods State Park Near Orick, Humboldt County (707) 464-6101 ext. 5301	Roosevelt elk
San Luis National Wildlife Refuge Los Banos, Merced County (209) 826-3508	Tule elk

Elk are wild and are therefore unpredictable. Do not provoke or harass them by approaching too closely. Bring binoculars to observe them best.

How Can I Help?

Elk are a valuable resource in California—one that will be here for future generations to enjoy, but only if properly managed. By joining the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF), you can maintain and enhance this resource, which represents all that is wild and free across the West. RMEF has created an opportunity for a diverse group of outdoor enthusiasts to channel their energy towards a common goal—habitat conservation for elk and other wildlife.

RMEF members have completed projects in California to help elk gain a better foothold on the future. Yet the task is far from complete. Every day, the constant demands of a growing human population place increasing pressure on elk and other wildlife. RMEF is cooperating with public agencies and private individuals to make sure California autumns will forever ring with the eerie bugle of the majestic bull elk.

If you are interested in conserving California's wildlife for future generations, or are simply interested in learning more about California's elk, please contact:

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PO Box 8249
Missoula, MT 59807-8249
1-800-CALL-ELK
(1-800-225-5355)
www.rmef.org



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California Elk



A Summary of Their Natural History and Management

California's Elk

California is the only state that is home to three of the four subspecies of North American elk: Roosevelt, Tule and Rocky Mountain.

Roosevelt elk, native to forests and mountains of California's Coast and Cascade mountain ranges, are found from northern Mendocino County to the Oregon border. They are the largest elk subspecies and the largest native land mammal in California.

Tule elk are found only in California. They are the most specialized elk in North America, and inhabit the oak woodlands and grasslands of central California.

Rocky Mountain elk, the second largest and most numerous elk subspecies nationwide, were introduced into Kern, Monterey and Shasta counties in California from Yellowstone National Park beginning in the early 1900s.



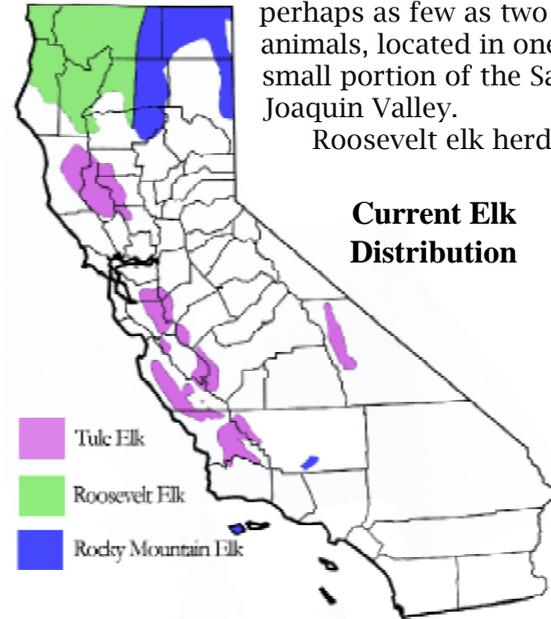
Tule elk bull. Photo by Greg Gothard.

History

It is likely that nearly 500,000 tule elk occupied California prior to the mid-1800s. One report, from an early explorer described nearly 2,000 elk in a single herd in the San Joaquin Valley!

Humans have dramatically altered elk range and habitat in California. Early Spanish explorers brought domestic livestock, along with non-native grasses that replaced the native vegetation elk depended on for food. The California gold rush led to unregulated market shooting, additional conversion of native habitat to agriculture, and competition with domestic livestock, which devastated elk populations. By 1875, the tule elk population was reduced to perhaps as few as two animals, located in one small portion of the San Joaquin Valley.

Roosevelt elk herds



Current Elk Distribution

also suffered from market shooting and environmental changes. Once ranging from San Francisco Bay northward, Roosevelt elk were eliminated from the southern portion of their range during the mining and logging eras.

Elk Facts

Elk are herbivorous (plant eating) and consume a wide variety of plants. They prefer grasses and forbs, but eat shrubs to meet nutritional needs during specific times of the year. In areas with harsh winters, elk restrict their movements to smaller areas that provide necessary food,



Roosevelt elk calf. Photo by Anne Laird.

cover and water. Their most active times of the day to feed are just before dawn, and two to three hours before sunset.

Male elk, or bulls, grow massive antlers that are shed annually. Large antlers are important status symbols and identify dominant bulls. During spring and summer, bull elk feed extensively to maximize body size, antler growth and fat reserves for the fall breeding season. Although cow elk do not grow antlers, they still require plenty of high-quality food and water to maintain pregnancy and successfully raise their calves, which are usually born between May and June.

Given the right habitat, elk herds grow rapidly, sometimes to the point of seriously damaging their food supply and, ultimately, their ability to survive. Unmanaged herds can also cause considerable damage to agriculture, gardens and golf courses. Elk have been relocated to temporarily solve some of these problems. Relocation elk has also been used to reestablish elk populations in their former range. However, elk relocation projects are very expensive, and finding suitable habitat is often difficult. Much of their former range no longer supports elk because of residential and agricultural development, or because of potential conflicts with California's rapidly expanding human population. Elk need large areas of land providing food, cover and water. Balancing the needs of wildlife with people is an increasingly complex task. Who needs the habitat more?

In addition to relocation, wildlife managers have used a carefully controlled hunting program and use of surgical implants to keep elk populations in balance with their habitat.



Roosevelt elk bull with harem. Photo by Don Jackson.