

Wapiti (*Cervus elaphus*)



Taxonomy:

Family Cervidae. Also known as elk (North America) and red deer (Europe). North American populations formerly considered to be a separate species (*Cervus canadensis*). Four subspecies are recognized from North America including *Cervus elaphus nelsoni* from our region.

Description:

Distinguished from the Mule deer by its larger size, dark head and neck, and large antler beam with a prominent brow tine.

Total length: 1.98-2.62 m; Tail: 80-170 mm; Weight: 171-498 kg.



Distribution:

Originally occurred throughout most of North America, now principally restricted to the western mountains with local reintroductions in portions of the former range. Common along the Wasatch Front.

Ecology and diet:

Wapiti occur in a wide variety of habitats, but are most numerous in grassland, brushy habitat, or open forest park lands. They are gregarious, often forming large herds. Wapiti are principally grazers, with diet consisting of grasses and forbs but also including leaves and young shoots of trees and shrubs.

Life History:

Wapiti breed during autumn when adult males compete to establish harems. The gestation period is about 8 months, usually producing one young (occasionally twins). Both sexes can mature as yearlings, although maturity may be delayed until the second year depending on conditions. Adult life span can exceed 20 years.

References: Peek 1999.