

# Elk

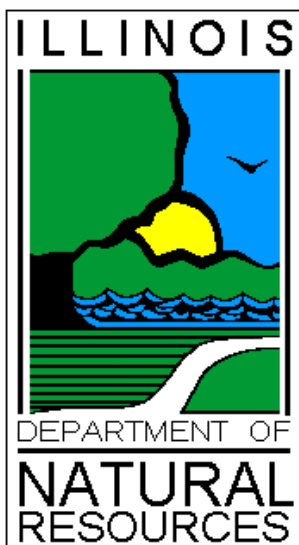
## *Cervus elaphus*

The elk is a member of the deer family. Its color varies from a light tan to a dark brown across its body, and the neck and legs are usually darker. The elk also has a distinct rump patch that is light beige. Male elk (bulls) are larger than female elk (cows), and only the bull has antlers. The bull weighs an average of 700 pounds, is five feet tall at the shoulder and can be eight feet long nose to tail. The cow is smaller, weighing 500 pounds, four and one-half feet tall at the shoulder and about six and one-half feet long.

The mating season (rut) begins in September and runs through most of October. During the rut, bull elk fight for dominance to establish who will lead a small harem of cows to breed. Calves are born from late May through early June. The cow elk will leave the herd just before she gives birth. She does this to not draw attention to her newborn calf. The newborn calf is very vulnerable to predators for about three weeks. Only its mother can protect it. The calf is born spotted and scentless, which helps it blend into its surroundings. The cow will graze at a distance away from the calf, only visiting it a few times a day so the calf can nurse. After these three weeks, the cow and calf return to the herd where there is safety in numbers. During the non-breeding months, cows and bulls separate. Cows and calves live together, and bulls live alone or in small bachelor groups.

Elk have tremendous eyesight, hearing and a keen sense of smell. Wolves, cougars and bears are the main predators of elk.

Elk were once found in Illinois but are now largely limited to mountainous areas in the western United States. Habitat change, expansion of settlements and hunting caused the extirpation of the elk in Illinois by the mid 1800s.



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