

Elk Throughout the Ages...

The oldest-known elk, known as "Irish Elk", were massive creatures with antlers that spread 12 feet long. Their bodies weighed over 1,000 pounds and reached heights well over 7 feet. Another ancestor to today's elk were the "Prehistoric Elk". These elk were revered for their fangs they often used in defense against predators. It is also thought that these elk may have used their saber-like canines to capture small mammals—hence, making them omnivores. However, both of these elk went extinct over 10,000 years ago.

Around the same time, the European Red Deer crossed the Bering Strait Land Bridge into North America. When the sea levels rose, the Bering Strait Land Bridge became submerged in the waters—thus trapping the European Red Deer on the North American continent. As the red deer dispersed into the various environments here in North America (desert, deciduous forest, tundra, etc.), these mammals adapted to their new habitats and became the six different subspecies of elk that originated in North America.

While at first there were six original subspecies of elk on this continent, human development and overhunting have since caused the extinction of two of the subspecies. One of those subspecies was the Eastern Woodland Elk—which was abundant throughout much of the U.S. east of the Mississippi River. However, the last Eastern Woodland Elk was shot in 1867.

In 1913, the Pennsylvania Game Commission began their efforts to reintroduce elk into Pennsylvania. Between 1913 and 1926, they transported 177 Rocky Mountain Elk into Pennsylvania. Thanks to the PGC and their partnership with KECA, Pennsylvania's wild elk herd is healthy and strong today!

What did you learn? Take the following true/false quiz to find out!

1. Prehistoric elk had enlarged canines that were like fangs. T/F
2. Eastern Woodland Elk roam the mountains of PA today. T/F
3. The European Red Deer is the ancestor of North America's elk. T/F
4. Only 3 subspecies of elk still remain in North America today. T/F
5. The last Eastern Woodland Elk was shot in 1867. T/F

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