

*John to Sam Redden Oct 6 for Oct 24*  
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ELK OR WAPITI OF OREGON

by  
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The elk or wapiti of Oregon, which is our largest deer, furnishes one of our most interesting wildlife stories. Our great mountainous areas are their chosen places where they like to live in summer, because here they have abundant food. Their winter ranges are in the foothills or lower valleys, but when these are taken up by farms and stock ranches, many elk seem to reach a starvation point.

The elk of this state have to be governed like the cattle on a ranch. A farmer has to keep the proper number of cattle so they have plenty of food both summer and winter, kill a certain amount, and keep others for breeding. He always needs more cows than bulls for the next crop. The elk are the property of the people and state and federal officials are responsible for their protection.

There are two kinds of elk living in Oregon. In the northeastern section there was formerly a large number of Rocky Mountain elk. This is the same species that has been so abundant in Yellowstone Park. In the mountains along the western coast from the Columbia River south to California, there has been a large number of Roosevelt elk. These are a little darker in color and the horns are shorter, heavy and often flattened toward the end. They were formerly very abundant in the mountains south of the Columbia River.

In the early days when the pioneers arrived in Oregon, elk were reported in almost every valley and mountain range of western Oregon, including the west slope of the Cascades. In 1910 the Forest Service officials reported that these elk had become very scarce in the Siskiyou and Siuslaw National Forests. In fact, there were very few in the Umpqua National Forest. There were only some fifteen ranging on either the Crater or Cascade National Forests. In 1929, the Forest Service reported that there was a total of 843 elk in western Oregon. As some of the Rocky Mountain elk had been introduced in the Cascades, there are now more of these than the Roosevelt elk.



This year's season for the shooting of elk starts October 26 and ends November 30. There is an open season on bull elk having antlers in all parts of the state, but there is a bag limit for either sex in certain regions. In southeastern Oregon, hunters can kill both bulls and cows. This ranges from Nyssa west on U. S. highway No. 28 to Redmond, then south on U. S. highway No. 97 to Fort Klamath and west on state highway No. 62 to Medford. From there south to the California state line, the whole Oregon section is open along the California, Nevada, and Idaho line back to Nyssa. However, there are only a few places in this vast region where elk may be found.

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The best hunting place for elk is in the northeastern part of Oregon where the season is open at the same time as in southeastern Oregon, and here antlerless elk can be killed. The northeastern area begins on the junction of Oregon and Washington just south of Walla Walla and extends on highway No. 11 south to Pendleton, then east on U. S. highway No. 30 to Kamela, then south to Starkey and Anthony Lakes, then northeast to North Powder and on U. S. highway No. 30 to Hot Lake, thence east to Lostine River and north to Lostine. From there the hunting line goes to Elgin on state highway No. 82, thence north along Grande Ronde River up to the Washington state line, thence west on the state line to the point of beginning.

In the winter when this region is covered with snow, thousands of elk work South into the Jackson Hole country of Wyoming where pasturage was abundant. As that valley was settled up and the land fenced, many of these animals starved to death. The government had to feed them during the winter. They also transferred a lot of elk to other states.

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There was a large number of elk or wapiti in different parts of Oregon in the early days. They were not properly protected so they decreased greatly in numbers until they seemed to be completely exterminated in some forest areas. For this reason a law was passed to prevent the killing of any of these great deer. For the past thirty years, the State Game Commission has made a careful study of the elk.

In Yellowstone Park there were more elk than in any other part of the country. Years ago when I crossed Big Game Ridge, which is the continental divide, one could look over a vast open country partially wooded and stretching off for miles in all directions. Looking down over a rocky ridge, I saw a herd of eighty elk lying like cattle in a grassy meadow. Off in another direction, was a larger band feeding along the mountain side. On a grassy slope to the North were hundreds of these big deer in all directions. This is the center of the great elk herds of our continent where they have a wide, rich summer range. In the winter when this region is covered with snow, thousands of elk work South into the Jackson Hole country of Wyoming where pasturage was abundant. As that valley was settled up and the land fenced, many of these animals starved to death. The government had to feed them during the winter. They also transferred a lot of elk to other states.

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elk brought from this region to St. Anthony, Idaho, and from there they were put in a railroad car and taken over to Joseph. There they were given a chance to rest for two days in a corral, then they were sledged on North fifty-six miles up the mountains and through the snow to their future home in the Wallowa National Forest. The following year in 1913, another herd of fifteen elk were added to this Billy Meadows herd. Here they had abundant summer pasture. As the years passed, the numbers increased. In 1917, some of these were captured and transported to the Cascade Range where they were liberated near Crater Lake Refuge. Later reports showed that the elk were increasing in the Blue Mountain forest. Mr. N. J. Billings, Supervisor of the Wallowa National Forest, in 1923 estimated that there were 350 elk in the Chesnimnus region.

Since these wapiti were increasing in other parts of the state, in the fall of 1933 Oregon hunters enjoyed the first open season for many years. That year a total kill of 579 elk was reported. 650 hunters had killed 125 of these fine game animals in the Chesnimnus herd in Wallowa County.

It is surprising how many elk have been shot since that date. 747 elk were killed in Oregon in 1934. Approximately one was killed for each five hunters. With close cooperation between the State Game Commission, State Police, and the national forest officers, the open season was handled in a scientific manner.

These are the records of the take through the years: 692 in 1935, 547 in 1936, 654 in 1937, 734 in 1938, 842 bulls and 379 cows in 1939, 1152 bulls and 1179 cows in 1940, 1169 bulls and 2388 cows in 1941, 1269 bulls and 1067 cows in 1942. Since the kill seemed to be too heavy in certain regions, the season was closed there. As an example, in Clatsop County 297 were taken in 1938, 227 in 1939, 198 in 1940. Then in 1941, the season was closed in that section.