

Welcome to Elk Island National Park of Canada, a beautiful, unique and historically rich national park. The Park protects one of the most endangered habitats in the country, the Southern Boreal Plains and Plateaux Natural Region. One of the few places in North America where you can see all of the original grazing species coexisting; the untamed beauty of Elk Island will impress you for a lifetime.

A Place for Nature

Elk Island is a unique transitional area that towers thirty to sixty metres above the surrounding plains. The Park's role in the conservation of rare, threatened and endangered species has continued since its creation as the first wildlife preserve in Canada in 1906.

A Place for Culture and History

Archaeological research has identified more than two hundred Aboriginal camps and stone tool-making sites within Elk Island. Over the years this area has been home to Aboriginal peoples, and German, English and Ukrainian settlers.

National Parks Are Places for People

Canadians and visitors to Canada come and experience solitude, nature, outdoor recreation, and history.

Places for the Future

The national parks of Canada protect and present significant examples of our country's natural and cultural heritage, in the past, today, and for future generations. Elk Island National Park celebrates its past, while looking to the future.

Welcome and enjoy your national park experience!

Frequently Asked Questions

Are pets allowed on the trails?

Yes, pets must be kept on a leash at all times. Please exercise caution while on the trails due to potential conflicts with wildlife.

Are bicycles allowed on the trails?

Yes, please travel at a reasonable speed and make noise. Startled animals may react aggressively. Bicycling is not permitted on Amisk Wuche Trail or the Living Waters Boardwalk but is recommended on the main parkway and other roadways.

Are boats allowed on the lakes?

Yes, non-motorized boats are allowed on Astotin Lake and Oster Lake. You may sail, canoe and kayak on Astotin Lake, and have up to 4 canoes or kayaks on Oster Lake. Boaters should be prepared to self-rescue.

Can you swim in the lakes?

Yes, you may swim in Astotin Lake. *Swimmer’s itch* is present and may cause skin irritation and itching. Take a shower (outdoor shower located at Astotin Lake) and wipe off with a towel immediately after leaving the water.

Why can’t I pick berries or flowers or feed the animals in the Park?

Plant matter plays many important roles in nature and is a source of food for wildlife. Human food can make animals sick and interfere with their natural ability to gather food. Removing, altering or damaging anything found in the Park is considered poaching and is illegal.

Why is this national park named ‘Elk Island’?

When Elk Park was established in 1906, it consisted of a 41 km² area surrounding what was formerly known as Island Lake (now called Astotin Lake). In 1913, when the area was designated a Dominion Park, the name Elk Island Park was selected because of two outstanding features, the elk and Island Lake.

Do I have to pay to drive through the Park?

Elk Island is bisected by the Yellowhead Highway (Hwy 16) that divides the Park into the main park and the wood bison area. As in the mountain national parks, there is no fee to travel on a public highway for through travel. Visitors who use parkways such as the Elk Island Parkway or wish to stop and use park facilities are charged a park user fee. A portion of these fees goes towards maintenance of scenic drives.

SUMMER	WINTER
BICYCLING <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • main parkway and other roads • for your safety, not recommended on trails 	
BIRDWATCHING <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 253 of Alberta’s 370 species have been sighted • located on several flight paths, habitats and at the meeting point of several natural regions, all creating a paradise for birds and birders alike 	BIRDWATCHING <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • year round residents flock in winter • chickadees, woodpeckers, nuthatches, blue jays, magpies and grouse
BOAT LAUNCH <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • canoe, kayak and sail boat launch • picnic shelter, washrooms and parking 	
BOATING <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • canoes, kayaks and sailboats on Astotin Lake • canoes and kayaks on Oster Lake; self-rescue • motorized boats are not permitted • boat rentals are not available 	

<p>CAMPING</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sandy Beach Campground • Oster Lake Campground, by reservation only • group camping 	<p>CAMPING</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • free winter camping at the boat launch • Oster Lake group camping, by reservation only; must hike or ski in
<p>FAMILY FUN</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Soccer field, horseshoe pits and playground located in the Astotin Lake Area 	
<p>GOLF COURSE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • nine-hole golf course located in Astotin Lake Area • equipment and cart rentals available from pro shop • golf fees do not include park user fees • licensed clubhouse with meal service; open to the public 	<p>PICNICKING</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cook shelters located in Astotin Lake Area, Tawayik Lake • pavilion cook shelter near shores of Astotin Lake • picnic tables, fire boxes and firewood provided
<p>PICNICKING</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • picnic tables, fire boxes and firewood provided • located throughout the Astotin Lake Area • accessible picnic sites at Tawayik Lake and boat launch • Beaver Bay picnic area (not accessible) 	
<p>PROGRAMS – INTERPRETIVE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • environmental education programs for students • evening theatre, guest speaker series, wildlife watching and junior naturalist programs 	<p>PROGRAMS – INTERPRETIVE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • environmental education programs for students • outreach education, Parks Canada in the classroom
<p>SHOWERS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • free hot showers at Sandy Beach Campground; campers only • Cold outdoor shower at the beach at Astotin Lake 	<p>PULL OFFS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Located on main parkway, for safe viewing of wildlife and scenery
<p>SWIMMING</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • in Astotin Lake • risk of contracting <i>Swimmer's Itch</i>; shower off immediately 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •
<p>TRAILS –ACCESSIBLE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shoreline Trail is wheelchair accessible • an all-terrain wheelchair, manually operated by a companion, is available on loan, at no charge, during the summer season 	<p>TRAILS – CROSS-COUNTRY SKIING</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • trail maps are available at the Gates, Visitor Information Centre, Warden Office, or on our website • some trails are groomed
<p>TRAILS – HIKING</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • trail maps are available at the Gates, Warden Office, Visitor Information Centre, Campground, or on our website • please keep pets on a leash at all times • 	<p>TRAILS – SNOWSHOEING</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • recommended on Lakeview Trail, Amisk Wuche Trail and Astotin Lake • please do not walk on groomed trails
<p>WASHROOMS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • flush toilets in Astotin Lake Area, Astotin Theatre and Visitor Information Centre • pump-out toilets at the boat launch parking lot and most trailheads 	<p>WASHROOMS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • flush toilets at Astotin Theatre and Visitor Information Centre • pump-out toilets at the boat launch parking lot and most trailheads

<p>WEATHER AND TRAIL SAFETY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • be prepared for rapid changes in the weather • take along a trail map • travel with others and keep your group together • stay on the trail; retrace your steps if unsure of your route or if you encounter threatening wildlife • cell phone reception is unreliable 	<p>WEATHER AND TRAIL SAFETY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • check local weather forecast before heading out on trails • bring along extra clothing to protect yourself from the elements • dress in layers; adjust to prevent overheating or overcooling • bring water and food • tell someone where you are going and when you will be back • beware of thin ice
<p>WILDLIFE VIEWING</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • hike a trail • stay awhile! 	<p>WILDLIFE VIEWING</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • smaller mammals such as porcupine, snowshoe hare and weasels enjoy the warmth of the winter sun • excellent photography opportunities • keep a safe distance and study animal tracks

Spring is calving time. Cow elk hide their calves for 10 days or more after birth. Orange – coloured bison calves are easy to spot on the landscape at this time of year. Animals can be more aggressive during the calving season; extra caution should be taken to give wildlife plenty of room.

Summer is the breeding season for bison. The “roaring” of the bull bison can be heard, day and night, as bulls challenge each other in the rutting ritual. Opportunities to view plains bison, moose, elk and deer are best at dusk and dawn as animals feed before bedding down. Beavers are also busiest at dusk and dawn.

Autumn is the breeding season for members of the deer family. Elk are highly vocal animals; when alarmed, the cows give sharp barks to warn the rest of the group. The whistling bugle of rutting bull elk is a spine-tingling sound and an experience unto itself on a frosty autumn morning.

Winter is an excellent time to watch for elk and moose. Wary, elusive elk are easier to spot as they spend more daylight hours foraging for food.

Year Round Scenic Wildlife Viewing Drives

There is something new to see with each season. Tune in to **FM 93.3** for up to date information on what is happening in Elk Island.

- 1) **Yellowhead Highway** (Hwy 16) bisects Elk Island National Park for 10 km. As you travel on the highway, watch for wood bison to the south and plains bison to the north.

- 2) **Elk Island Parkway** is the major roadway through the Park: 20 km north and south. Plains bison, moose, elk, deer, and coyotes may be seen. Bison herds gather during the rut (mid-July to mid-August); elk herds are commonly seen during the winter. Take your time!

- 3) **Tawayik Lake Picnic Area** is located 1 km off the Elk Island Parkway. The short drive takes you to a serene lakeshore picnic area with an accessible viewing platform and telescope. Shorebirds and waterfowl are abundant and bison often graze in the area.

Travelling on the Parkway

Be patient and careful as motorists may not be familiar with the Park and may stop suddenly. Animals may attempt to flee from a car by continuing to run alongside the vehicle. If safe to do so, pull over or slow down until the animal leaves the road.

Exhibits and Viewpoints are located at most trailheads. Some of the most spectacular views can be seen on the shores of Astotin and Tawayik Lakes, especially at sunrise and sunset. When safe to do so, pull over to enjoy the wildlife and scenery; use a pull off, a trailhead parking lot, or watch for signs indicating viewpoints.

From Dusk to Dawn

Be extra careful at sunrise, sunset and at night, this is when animals are most likely to be on the road. Animals may panic when they see your headlights; slow down until you are well past them.

Caution! You Are In Bison Country

If you encounter bison while in your vehicle:

- Bison are used to motor vehicles and may ‘appear’ docile.
- Stay in your vehicle and do not approach bison;
- Wait for the bison to move off the road or drive slowly around the group.
- Do **NOT** honk your horn when you encounter a bison herd.
- Hurrying the bison may result in damage to your vehicle.

Report injured or aggressive bison to Parks Canada staff.

Distances from...		
Highway 16	(in km's)	North Gate
0.0	Highway 16	19.5
0.8	Elk Island Visitor Centre	18.7
1.5	South Gate	18.0
4.7	Tawayik Lake/Oster Road	14.8

6.7	Shirley Lake/Simmons Trailhead	12.8
7.1	Hayburger Trailhead	12.4
11.7	Moss Lake Trailhead/Picnic Area	7.8
14.0	Astotin Lake Area*	5.5
14.4	Amisk Wuche Trailhead	5.1
16.3	Beaver Pond Trailhead	1.9
19.5	North Gate	0.0
25.0	Lamont	5.5

*Astotin Lake Area is the focal point for many visitor activities

CAMPING

Sandy Beach Campground

Main Loop ~ Walk-in Tenting ~ RV Sites ~ Overflow

- located in the Astotin Lake Area
- open: May long weekend to Thanksgiving weekend (weather permitting)
- staffed part-time; self-registration
- 77 semi-serviced sites; advanced reservation and first-come first-served
- accessible
- potable water
- sani-station
- flush toilets, free showers, firepits and pay telephone

Sandy Beach Campground Reservation

1-877-737-3783 (1-877-RESERVE)

www.pccamping.ca

Overflow camping is only available when Main and RV loops are full. No fires are permitted.

Group Camping is by reservation only.

Call: 780-922-5833.

- Sandy Beach is available May to September, except on long weekends. Minimum 10 people, maximum 60.
- Oster Lake is a limited access site that is available year round and can accommodate up to 75 people.

Winter Camping is permitted free of charge for self-contained vehicles in the boat launch parking lot.

Long-weekend Liquor Ban at Sandy Beach Campground

Elk Island is a place where families can enjoy an abundance of activities, reconnect with nature and experience a national park at its best. To encourage this memorable experience the Superintendent has banned the possession and consumption of alcohol on all long weekends from May to September. These liquor bans are enforced for the duration of each long weekend.

BARE Campground Program

Please store all food and any other items that attract wildlife, in a hard-sided vehicle when not in use.

Beaver Hills Dark Sky Preserve

Elk Island expands its scope of protection by including the dark sky. On September 3, 2006, the Beaver Hills Dark Sky Preserve (BHDSP) was designated through a partnership among Alberta Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture, the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada – Edmonton Centre and the Parks Canada Agency. Elk Island is the third site in the Parks Canada family to be designated as a Dark Sky Preserve.

The BHDSP encompasses all of Elk Island National Park and the Cooking Lake-Blackfoot Provincial Recreation Area for a total protected area of 293 km². Within it are a wide range of habitats and numerous wildlife species.

The Beaver Hills DSP will protect nocturnal habitats for present and future generations and encourage public enjoyment and awareness of the cultural heritage of the night sky. It will also help reduce artificial light glare, increasing the visibility of the night sky to benefit all life on Earth.

Celebrate the dark sky on Labour Day long weekend in the Park.

Park User Fees

National park user fees support the maintenance of scenic drives, trails, picnic areas, information services and interpretive opportunities for visitors. Park fees are an investment in the future, so that generations to come will also enjoy all that our national parks and historic sites have to offer. Parks Canada offers you quality services and excellent value.

Day Pass

Valid from the date of issue until 4 p.m. the following day, in any national park. Children under 6 enter free. For longer stays you can use your day passes as a credit to upgrade to an annual pass. Ask Parks Canada staff for more information.

To Purchase Your Park Pass

Before you arrive:

- call us at 780-992-2950 or toll free at 1-800-748-PARK
- e-mail: elk.island@pc.gc.ca
- national park passes are available at the Strathcona County Taxation Office, Sherwood Park

At the Park Gates, Visitor Information Centre or Warden Office

- Major credit cards, Debit, Travellers Cheques or cash
- Day passes are available 24-hours a day from the Automated Pass Machines by Visa, MasterCard, American Express or coin.

Early Bird discounts are available for Elk Island National Park Annual Passes from December 1 to March 31.

Vehicles must display a valid park pass at all times.

Your Fees At Work

Potable water in the Astotin Lake Area and at the Visitor Information Centre. In an effort to provide better services for park visitors, resurfacing of the main Parkway and five new pull-off areas will allow for better wildlife viewing and will enhance public safety.

Regulations

KEEP THE WILD IN WILDLIFE

To preserve Canada's natural and cultural heritage for future generations, visitors to Elk Island National Park must comply with national park regulations. Park Wardens work in co-operation with other conservation agencies to deter poaching, conserve wildlife, protect natural resources, and to ensure your safety.

The Park offers wonderful opportunities to observe wild animals in their natural surroundings. Wildlife should be treated with respect and great caution.

Keep 100 metres (300 feet) away from large mammals.

Wild animals are unpredictable and potentially dangerous. Never approach nesting colonies, dens, lairs, beaver lodges, dams or an animal with young.

Do not touch or feed wildlife. Your body odour or chemicals on your skin can harm wildlife. Human food may be difficult for the animals to digest and may condition them to being fed, resulting in the loss of their ability to fend for themselves.

Minimize wildlife harassment. Calling or enticing an animal puts you and the animal at risk. Elk bugling, game calling and coyote howling are considered wildlife harassment and are prohibited.

Keep pets on a leash. For your safety, pets must be kept on a leash at all times. Droppings must also be removed.

Poaching includes killing wildlife, collection of wildlife parts such as skulls, horns and antlers, removal of eggs and picking of flowers, plants, berries, and mushrooms. Poaching is strictly prohibited.

Stay on existing roads, trails and pathways to avoid trampling the vegetation. Off-road vehicles are prohibited.

Gathering firewood and kindling is prohibited.

If you witness any of the above activities, require more information on wildlife safety or to report aggressive wildlife, please contact Parks Canada staff.

Park Directory (Area Code 780)

**Some facilities are operated on a seasonal basis.*

Emergency:

RCMP/FIRE/AMBULANCE

911

Warden 24-hour Dispatch Line

992-6389

General Information	992-2950
Environmental Education Programs (office hours)	992-2965
Visitor Information Centre	922-5790
Elk Island Golf Course	998-3161
Campgrounds	
Sandy Beach	992-0017
Group Camping Reservations	922-5833
Campground Reservation Service www.pccamping.ca	1-877-737-3783 (1-877-RESERVE)
Parks Canada Wildlife Watch	1-888-927-3367
Alberta Environment Report-A-Poacher	1-800-642-3800

Write to:
 Superintendent
 Elk Island National Park of Canada
 R.R.#1, Site 4
 Fort Saskatchewan, Alberta T8L 2N7
 Fax: 992-2951
 E-mail: elk.island@pc.gc.ca
<http://www.pc.gc.ca/elkisland>

Jobs @ Parks Canada

Parks Canada is always hiring. Visit www.pc.gc.ca/agen/empl/ to learn about the types of work Parks Canada staff do, the staffing process and information for students and others.

In the Beginning (Prior to 1900)

For centuries, Aboriginal peoples travelled through the western landscape. The Beaver Hills provided relief along the journey; a place to hunt, gather and rest. Aspen thickets surrounded by prairie provided forage, protection and plenty of water for plains bison, elk, moose and deer.

Elk Island National Park has more than 200 Aboriginal sites; most were campsites and places where the Tssu T'ina (Sarcee), Nehiwyan (Plains Cree), and their allies, the Nakota (Assiniboine), Kainai (Blood), and Siksika (Blackfoot) people hunted for game.

Men of Vision – Establishment of Elk Park (1900 to 1910)

On March 28, 1906 Canada's first wildlife sanctuary was established. Five local men pledged by bond to the Dominion Government of Canada to protect one of the last remaining herds of elk in Canada. William Andrew Dickson Lees, Johnson Carscadden, Ellsworth Simmons, William H. Cooper and Francis Austin Walker signed a \$5000 bond to establish Elk Park, a 41 square kilometre fenced enclosure around Astotin Lake.

In 1908, Elk Park was renamed Elk Island Park.

Return of the Plains Bison (Circa 1910 – 1920)

The plains bison in Elk Island National Park originated from a private herd owned by Charles Allard and Michel Pablo of Ronan Montana. For \$245 a head, the Dominion Government of Canada purchased Pablo's share of the herd. In 1907, approximately 400 plains bison were shipped to the Park by railway, via Lamont, en route to their final destination, Buffalo National Park at Wainwright. Forty-eight animals eluded capture; their offspring remain in Elk Island to this day. This herd flourished and over the next century thousands of plains bison from the Park were sent to other natural areas in North America to re-establish herds where they once roamed. Their return represents one of the most significant events in Canadian conservation history.

Elk Island National Park designated 2007 as the "Year of the Bison" marking 100 years of bison conservation.

Growth and Development (1920 – 1930)

By 1922, the Park was increased in size to allow for growing wildlife populations. Development for visitor use began in 1923 and by 1924, the Elk Island Parkway was constructed from the north to the south.

Elk Island Becomes a National Park (1930 – 1940)

In 1930, the Park was renamed Elk Island National Park as declared under the new *National Parks Act* and was obligated to preserve the natural environment for the enjoyment and use by the people of Canada and for future generations.

Dual Mandate for the National Park • Preservation and Recreation (1940 - 1950)

New recreation facilities were constructed after World War II including two bungalow camps, a dance hall, a band shell, tennis courts and a service station. Sandy Beach Campground opened in 1947. In keeping with the preservation mandate, a program was initiated, in 1941, to bring back the beaver to the Beaver Hills after centuries of over-trapping. Today more than 1000 beaver reside in the national park.

Ukrainian Pioneer Home (1950 to 1960)

In 1951, Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent officially opened the Ukrainian Pioneer Home, a replica of a typical home built by early Ukrainian settlers. The Ukrainian Pioneer Home was federally designated as the oldest purpose-built Ukrainian museum in Canada. The home remains unoccupied, as it does not meet today's building standards.

Wood Bison (1960 – 1970)

Thought to be extinct, a small herd of pure wood bison were located in 1957 in a remote corner of Wood Buffalo National Park. For conservation purposes, 23 animals were transported to Elk Island National Park in 1965. Most wild populations of wood bison that currently exist in North America can be traced back to the Elk Island herd.

Fire Management (1970 – 1980)

In 1979, fire was reintroduced into the Park through carefully planned prescribed burns. After decades of fire suppression, the aspen forest in Elk Island National Park began to dominate the grassland areas. Fire became recognized as an essential tool to re-establish the balance of forest, grassland and other types of vegetation, thus maintaining healthy ecosystems.

Trumpeter Swan Reintroduction Program (1980 – 1990)

In 1987, Elk Island National Park began a trumpeter swan reintroduction program. The trumpeter swan population declined in the 1800's when the settlement of the prairies resulted in over-hunting and loss of critical habitat.

After an absence of over a hundred years, the largest waterfowl in North America has once again firmly established itself in the Park.

Beaver Hills Ecosystem (1990 – 2000)

At the turn of the millennium, the Beaver Hills Initiative was established in collaboration with Elk Island National Park, municipal partners, environmental groups, the provincial government and industry. Its mission is to support cooperative efforts to sustain the quality of water, land, air, natural resources and community development.

A Place for Protection and People (2000 and Beyond)

The year 2006 marked the 100th anniversary for Elk Island as the first wildlife preserve in Canada. The Park has evolved in many ways but the vision remains the same. Today it continues to be a place for nature and for people.

A hundred years have come and gone, and with that vision, an incredible legacy began. Imagine what the next hundred years will bring...

Having a Safe Visit

Parks Canada wants to help you enjoy your trip and stay safe. Please limit your impact on park wildlife by giving all animals the respect they deserve and the space they need. Enjoy a safe visit and ensure that future generations have the chance to see wildlife that is truly wild.

To Increase Your Enjoyment While on the Trails

- Travel with others, on established trails, during daylight hours.
- Dress in layers, carry sufficient water, insect repellent and sunscreen.
- Pick only trails suitable for your fitness level. Let someone know where you are going, and when you expect to be back.

Give animals the right of way and stay at least three bus lengths away (100 metres).

Remember, You Are in Bison Country!

- Make noise to let the bison know you are in the area.
- Keep a watchful eye on the bison and the trail, leave a wide berth and walk slowly past.
- Avoid approaching bison. They may charge if they feel threatened.
- Retreat immediately to the trailhead if signs of aggression occur.
- Bicycling is not recommended on the trails.

Elk Alert!

- Cow elk can be especially dangerous during calving season (mid-May to the end of June).
- Bull elk are most dangerous during mating season (mid-September to the end of October).

If You Are Approached by a Predator

Predators occur in many shapes and sizes and help prevent overpopulation of prey species, which helps maintain ecological integrity. If a predator approaches you, send a clear message that you are **NOT** potential prey. Keep your pet on a leash and walk them during daylight hours only.

The Friends of Elk Island Society is a non-profit cooperative association, which works with Parks Canada Agency to protect, preserve, and promote Elk Island National Park.

Do you want to make a lasting contribution to Elk Island National Park of Canada?

Become a member and ...

- help shape policy by voicing concerns and electing volunteer board members;
- participate in meetings, projects, and special events;
- develop skills through volunteer activities;
- receive The Trumpeter newsletter of events and information;
- enjoy merchandise discounts at 'Friends of' sales outlets across Canada.

Visit the Friends of Elk Island Society website <http://www.elkisland.ca>

SURVEY OF MAMMALS

	Main Park Area	Wood Bison Area	Total
Plains Bison	400	0	400
Wood Bison	0	320	320
Elk (Wapiti)	300	400	700
Moose	105	210	315

Deer	237	250	487
Coyotes			200
Beaver*			1120
Cougar	No resident population	No resident population	
Bear	No resident population	No resident population	

*Numbers are estimates. Beaver population fluctuates according to water levels and disease.

The Big Six

Elk or Wapiti

Cervus manitobensis

Size: second largest member of the deer family at 4 to 5 feet tall

Average Weight: Bulls up to 450 kg

Pelage: Mainly medium brown with a cream coloured rump.

Head: Dark brown throat mane, only the males have antlers.

Diet: Grazer – eats grasses and sedges in the spring and summer; browses on twigs in winter.

Moose

Alces alces anderson

Size: largest member of the deer family at 6 to 7 feet tall

Average Weight: bull 450 kg

Pelage: dark brown upperparts fade to grey on the legs

Head: long with a humped nose and a belling hanging from the throat. Males have shovel like antlers.

Diet: browser – eats twigs in winter and leaves in summer; aquatic plants for salt.

BISON

Bison are the largest native terrestrial mammals in North America. Wood bison and plains bison have the same general characteristics.

The bison in Elk Island National Park live in separate fenced areas of the Park to ensure they don't interbreed.

Bison or Buffalo? So what is the difference, anyway?

Simply put, the correct term for the largest land mammal in North America is bison.

Bison may resemble their relatives, but they are different species than that of the Asian water buffalo and African buffalo that live in Southeast Asia and Africa..

There are three distinct sub-species of bison in the world today. European bison live in Poland and European portions of the former Soviet Union.

Plains bison and wood bison are exclusive to North America.

Wood Bison (south of Highway 16)

Bison bison athabasca

Size: average length 3.9 metres

Average Weight: bull 840 kilograms

Head: massive heavy head and longer neck; straight long hair on head, sloping down on forehead, horns extending over hair, small pointed beard

Pelage: winter coat is dark brown; little or no chap hair on forelegs. Cape does not form a distinct boundary from the rest of the body.

Hump: square shoulder hump; highest point well forward of shoulder

Tail: longer with long hairs

Diet: grasses & sedges

Plains Bison (north of Highway 16)

Bison bison bison

Size: average length 3.4 metres

Average Weight : bull 730 kilograms

Head: massive heavy head and short neck; frizzy hair on head

Pelage: winter coat is medium brown; chaps of long hair on forelegs – usually lighter in colour. In summer, cape forms a distinct boundary from the rest of body

Hump: round shoulder hump; highest point over front legs

Tail: short

Diet: grasses & sedges

White-tailed Deer

Odocoileus virginianus

Size: smaller and more solitary than mule deer

Average Weight: buck 90 kg

Pelage: brownish-grey to brownish-red

Head: face has white throat and eye rings. Only the males have antlers.

Diet: grazer in summer; browser in fall and winter (buds and twigs of shrubs and saplings and needles of evergreens)

Mule Deer

Odocoileus hemionus

Size: larger and stockier than white-tailed deer.

Average Weight: buck 100 kg.

Pelage: brownish-grey during the summer; grey during the winter.

Head: dark forehead, tan face with black muzzle, large prominent ears with black border. Only the males have antlers.

Diet: grazer in spring and summer; browser in fall and winter (twigs, saplings and shrubs)

Birder's Paradise

Elk Island National Park is a transitional zone between boreal forest and aspen parkland containing several distinct habitats within a small area. This variety of upland habitat and extensive wetlands provides opportunities for many species to forage and breed.

Of the 253 species recorded in the national park, 137 are known to breed here.

Trumpeter Swan Conservation Success

Trumpeter swans used to be abundant in North America, however by the early 1900's they were hunted to near extinction. The trumpeter swan conservation project began in Elk Island National Park in 1987, with the objective of establishing a migratory, breeding flock of ten or more pairs in the Park. Minimizing harassment to the swans and maximizing their sense of security is vital to the success of the transplant program.

Please remain in your vehicle or if hiking, avoid approaching trumpeter swans. Trumpeter swans are extremely susceptible to human disturbance and may not return to the Park

Vegetative Communities

Located in the Southern Boreal Plains and Plateaux Natural Region, Elk Island National Park is a unique transitional area where aspen dominate the lower boreal mixed wood forest. Vegetation patterns change constantly due to the Park's geography, climate and a variety of other natural processes.

The Park includes a variety of habitats for plant and animal life. Hummocky terrain creates a variety of microclimates that support a rich mosaic of aspen forest, wetlands, boreal mixed-wood forest, sedge meadows, shrubs and grasslands.

