



# WILD Kids



## What is a Wapiti?

Wapiti is the Shawnee word for elk. It means "white rump." Elk are members of the deer family and belong to a larger group of mammals called **ungulates**. All ungulates have hooves made of **keratin**. Keratin is made by the skin and can be a very hard substance. (Skin, hair, whiskers, fingernails, claws, talons and horns are all made of keratin.) There are odd-toed ungulates and even-toed ungulates. Examples of odd-toed ungulates include the rhinoceros (three toes), horses and zebras (both one toed). Examples of even-toed ungulates include camels (two toes), hippopotamuses and javelina (both four toed). Elk have four toes. Tracks made by elk generally only show the two major toes. The inside and outside toes are very short, so elk only walk on the two middle ones.



Elk have long muscular legs that help them run fast and escape predators. Black bears, coyotes, and wolves prey upon young elk called **calves**. **Mountain lion** and grizzly bears can kill an adult elk. An adult female elk, called a **cow**, can weigh up to 500 pounds. An adult male, called a **bull**, can weigh over 700 pounds!

Each spring bulls grow **antlers**. Antlers arise from a bony 'bump' on the forehead called the **pedicel**. Antlers begin growing in the spring. As daylight increases in the spring, the elk begins to produce hormones for antler growth. Growing antlers are covered by **velvet**. Velvet is fur-covered skin that carries blood vessels and nerves to the growing antler. Some elk can grow over 4 feet of antlers in just 90 days!

In late summer and early fall the velvet dies. Blood vessels in the velvet are filled with calcium so no more blood can flow. At this time antlers also stop growing. Elk rub their antlers against trees, branches, bushes and grasses to remove the dead velvet. This is the time bull elk begin bugling to attract cows for mating.

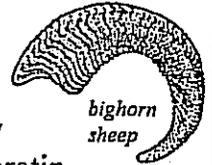
In late winter, decreasing hormones cause the connection between the pedicel and antler to weaken. **Shedding** or **casting** of antlers then occurs. Both antlers can be cast on the same day or within a day or two of each other. In mid to late spring, as daylight increases, the cycle begins once again.

### Horns or Antlers?

*Cattle and goats have horns.  
Deer and elk have antlers. What are the differences?*

#### HORNS ARE:

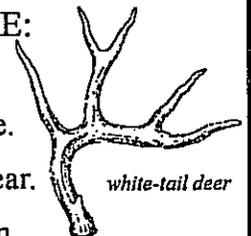
- ✓ made of a bony core covered by thin layers of keratin.
- ✓ slow growing and permanent.
- ✓ more like daggers than branches.
- ✓ usually grown by both sexes.
- ✓ grow in yearly 'rings' that may mark the animal's age.



*Pronghorn antelope have horns covered with a sheath of hairlike material that is shed each year.*

#### ANTLERS ARE:

- ✓ made of fast growing bone.
- ✓ shed every year.
- ✓ usually grown only by males (both sexes of reindeer and caribou grow antlers).
- ✓ often branched (but the number of branches or points does not signify age).



## ELK TALK

Elk are among the noisiest ungulates. They can make many different sounds, each sound communicating something different.

**High-pitched squeal:** Newborn calf to its mother, who recognizes her calf by its voice.

**Bark:** Warning of danger.

**Chips, mews and miscellaneous squeals:** General communication among herd members.

**Bugling** (A bugle is a bellow that escalates to a squealing whistle and ending with a grunt.)  
Bulls courting cows. Warns other bulls to stay away or announcing readiness to fight.

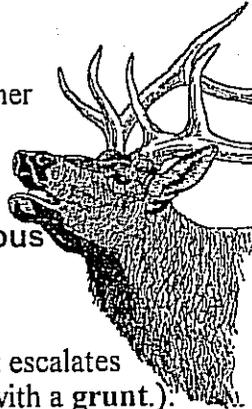
Elk also use **body language** to communicate.

**Dominance:** Head held high

**Fighting:** Standing on hind legs, ears held back.

**Alarm:** Head held high, body leaning forward, ears cocked forward or to the side, eyes wide open, nostrils flared. Movements are tense.

**Herding:** Ears laid back, antlers tilted back, neck stretched, nose up. Generally followed by a bugle.



## ACTIVITY I: Make Your Own Antlers

*(Adapted from Ranger Rick's NatureScope: Amazing Mammals Part II.)*

For this project you will need: 5 lbs flour, 10-15 cups warm water, lots of newspaper cut into 6 to 8 inches long strips, large bucket, mixing spoon, shoebox or other small box, coat hangers, scissors, wire cutters, small paper drinking cup, tape, paint, brushes, white paper towels.

Begin by pushing a long length of wire through opposite sides of the box. Add more wire, bending as needed, to give shape to your antlers and their branches.

Next, mix the flour and just enough warm water to form a thick paste. This is your paper-mache paste.

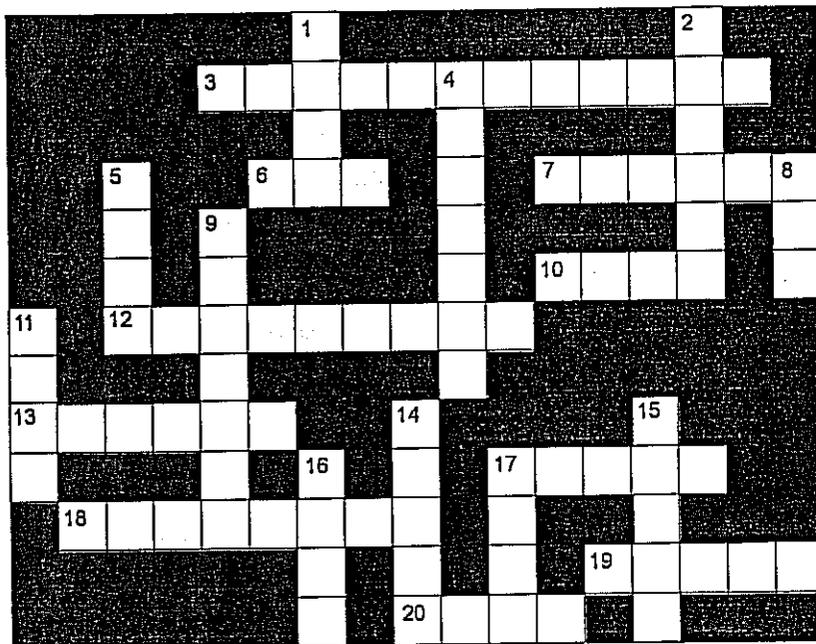
Dip the strips of newspaper into the paste. Cover both sides with the paste. Scrape off excess paste. Apply the pasty strips to the wires to form antlers.

Tape a paper cup to the front of the box. Cover with paper-mache strips. This will form the snout or nose of your animal.

To smooth out the paper-mache, add a final layer of white paper towels. The paper towels will stick to the wet paper-mache.

Let the antlers and snout dry for several days. Then paint.

## Activity II: Crossword Puzzle



### ACROSS

3. A predator of elk
6. Relative of moose, deer and caribou
7. Covers a growing antler
10. Female elk
12. Another name for a plant-eater
13. A Shawnee name for elk
17. What a male elk does to warn other males
18. Another name for caribou
19. A bugle ends with this sound
20. Another word for casting of antlers

### DOWN

1. A male elk
2. Elk walk on their toes called . . . .
4. All male ungulates grow these
5. Elk hold their heads. . . . to show dominance
8. Elk walk on . . . . toes
9. Hooves are made of . . . .
11. General conversation among the herd
14. Sheep grow these permanent head structures
15. Head high, body forward, eyes wide open, ears cocked forward or to the side
16. A group of elk is called a . . . .
17. Antlers are made of . . . .