

Deer and Elk

“The definitive expression and full embodiment of the plant people are the four legged. For some, they are the most sought after creature of our lands. With certainty, every year the elk bugles from the mountaintops, singing to one another and calling out our hunting families- pressing them to pursue a living legacy.”

-Valerie Segrest, Muckleshoot



Whulshootseed name: sqig^wəc

General Description: Deer are browsers mostly feeding on shrubs while elk are grazers feeding on grasses. Their diets are broad and diverse however, and can include almost any type of vegetation. Migratory behavior for both deer and elk is variable with some being long-range migrators of 30 miles or more, some moving only up in elevation, or not moving at all. They have chambered stomachs that ferment foods like grasses and plants, this process allows for more nutrients to be extracted than other grazers like horses and cows. Deer and elk are the most important terrestrial animal for many Coast Salish Natives because of their contribution as food and other valuable uses. Not only is the meat eaten but the hides, sinew, hooves, bones, and antlers furnish valuable materials for clothing, ornaments, and tools.

Deer: Columbian black-tailed deer are a sub-species of mule deer and are typically found west of the Cascade Crest. They inhabit dense forests and forest edges where they browse on a variety of plants. Black-tailed deer have small home ranges where they typically live that can be as small as 0.25 square miles. As their name implies, they have a large, wide, mostly black tail. Acute vision, hearing, and smell along with their inhabiting of densely vegetated environment can make hunting deer difficult.

Mule deer are found east of the Cascade Crest and are found in more open sagebrush habitats during winter and open forested stands in summer. Mule deer home ranges are larger, in part due to less productive habitat as well as more open habitat. Mule deer tend to be larger than black-tailed deer, have larger ears, and have a smaller mostly white tail with small black tip. Hunting mule deer in open habitats is easier with a rifle, but more difficult with traditional methods because they can see the hunter coming and thus takes more stalking skill. Males are distinctive with antlers that are lost every year.

Black-tail and mule deer normally do not interbreed, but at the crest they may come together in summer and hybridization has occurred. Hunters sometime notice an animal the size of a mule deer but having a tail resembling black-tail with ears and antlers not being typical of the deer found on particular side of the Cascade Crest. These are often called bench-leg deer.

Elk: Elk are much larger than deer with distinctive white rumps and massive antlers. Male elk can breed 30 or more females who they group up and defend as a harem. Elk can live up to 22 years. Females live longer than males due to the stresses and injuries resulting from competition for mates during breeding season. They can have large home ranges, typically smaller in winter than in summer if migratory. They prefer meadows, wetlands, and open forests where they graze more on grasses and herbs than twigs.

Washington's ancestral elk, the Roosevelt elk, were hunted close to extinction in the late 1800's due to post-contact mismanagement of resources. Nowadays, the native Roosevelt elk occur only on the Olympic Peninsula. During the early 1900's Rocky Mountain elk from Yellowstone were transplanted to various locations along the western Cascade slopes and today most elk found east of Interstate-5 are of the Rocky Mountain variety. When they were introduced, they readily adapted and expanded from the foothills into the mountains as the forests were cut. Both archaeological evidence and oral tradition document that, prior to urban sprawl and industrial development, elk were found in areas such as the banks of Duwamish and the shores of Lake Washington. Elk have recolonized former areas and are now common on the Enumclaw Plateau and along the White and Green Rivers to Auburn and Sumner.



Hunting Techniques: Orcas and dolphins, wolves and red tailed hawks, eagles and humans are pack hunters. We have all learned that hunting cooperatively makes efficient use of time and resources. In order to really understand hunting techniques, one must be dedicated and willing to put the time in to learning through keen observation and patience. Skilled hunters shoot big game with bow and arrow, setting traps or driving animals in to large nets. Nowadays, many hunters use rifles and aim for a quick shot to the heart so that the animal does not suffer.



Processing: Once the animal is killed and located, the hunter will work fast to gut the animal, then in a cool area hang and skin the animal. At this time the animal is ready to be butchered and packaged. This entire process is necessary in order to have quality meat for consumption. Every part of deer and elk – from the bone marrow, to the hide, to the brains, to the eyes, tongue and antlers – was and is traditionally utilized. The head was even boiled and eaten as a stew.

Food and Medicine: Both deer and elk are higher in nutrients and lower in fat than beef, which makes them a better food for our health. Domestically raised animals contain antibiotics and/or hormones that can have negative effects on people, so game meat is healthier. Meat processed by butchers into sausages contains nitrites, nitrates, salt, and maybe MSG so consume these sparingly. It is preferable to learn how to process wild game meat into sausages so that the preparer can control the amount of spices and sodium, yielding a healthy version that the commercially available variety.



Wildlife Management:

Coast Salish Ancestors knew that high elevation open areas yielded productive deer and elk herds. They burned forested areas to promote open meadows that provided abundant nutritious forage for deer and elk. This not only enhanced deer and elk numbers, and produced fatter animals, but also made hunting easier by bringing animals to these focal areas. Burning also enhanced Berry production. Nowadays, tribes like Muckleshoot actively manage elk herds by studying habitat and managing predators of deer and elk.

Fun Fact: Deer typically have twins but elk rarely do. Twins allow for greater hunting opportunity and higher harvest. Black-tailed deer teeth show less tooth wear for the same age of animal than mule deer due to the foods they eat, so black-tails can live longer than mule deer because they have their teeth longer. When not hunted, both elk and deer mortality is mostly caused by predators.

Resources:

For more on dressing deer see the video at:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_xUpUnG3lrE#t=19

If you are concerned about the food safety of the animal you kill and want to eat, consider reading *Is This Safe To Eat?* The publication contains valuable information about various diseases, parasites, and other afflictions encountered by hunters who kill wild game.

https://www.nwhc.usgs.gov/publications/disease_emergence/Chapter5.pdf

Vanessa's Pemmican

Pemmican is well known for its high concentration of nutrients and its long shelf life. This combination of fat, protein and carbohydrate will keep you energized all day. Traditionally dried meat like venison and elk would be pounded together with fat and dried berries. Pemmican makes an excellent snack and was utilized as a travel food.

- 1 cup dried venison, elk or beef jerky
- 1 cup dried berries (huckleberry, cranberry, salal or other)
- 1 cup raw hazelnuts, walnuts, sunflower seeds or almonds
- 1/3 cup nut butter (hazelnut, almond, cashew or peanut butter)
- 1 tablespoon honey



With a knife, chop meat into very small pieces. Add dried berries, nuts and nut butter in a food processor, blend well. Add the dried meat and blend well. Store in plastic bags or containers in a dark, cool place. This will keep for several months.

Recipe from Vanessa Cooper, Lummi

Seared Elk Roast

This easy recipe is a perfect solution to a busy schedule. You will be deeply satisfied with the results. Elk meat is low in fat and high in nutrients. When slowly cooked it falls apart and melts in your mouth.

- 2-3 pound elk roast
- Salt (to season meat liberally)
- Pepper (to season meat liberally)
- Olive oil
- 4 medium-sized Ozette, red or yellow fin potatoes, cut in large pieces
- 1 large onion, cut in large pieces
- 3 carrots, chopped
- 2 celery stalks, chopped
- 3 cloves of garlic, peeled and chopped
- 1 teaspoon each – dried rosemary, sage and thyme
- 1 bay leaf
- 3 cups water or beef broth
- Salt and pepper to taste

Rinse elk and pat dry. Salt and pepper all sides liberally. Heat a pan to medium high heat and sear the roast on all sides. This process locks in the juices and provides an extra savory flavor to the broth. In the bottom of a slow cooker or roast pan add vegetables, garlic and herbs then place the seared meat on top. Add broth, bring to a boil on high, and then turn down to low and let cook for 6-8 hours or until elk comes apart with a fork. Add salt and pepper to taste.

Cook time: 6-8 hours. Serves 6-8

Recipe from Valerie Segrest, Muckleshoot