

Living on a Lake in the Country: Elk Trip

By Gayle Rich-Boxman

The morning of December 16, 2008, it was 10 degrees outside, one of the coldest that winter. The call I received that morning meant being outside for several hours, but it was going to be worth it. A small group of us who are Fishhawk Lake residents, located in Birkenfeld, got a last minute chance to be part of the daily feeding of big herds of wild elk at the Elk Reserve in Jewell Oregon, seventeen miles away. It entailed a hayride on the main highway for about a quarter of a mile, then into the reserve itself to throw out their rations of hay. While on the buckboard, we were going to have an up-close-and-personal view of these magnificent creatures and for those of us who love nature photography, it would be a momentous occasion.

With the backdrop of snow-capped Saddle Mountain, crystal clear blue skies as well as the dappling of snow on the well-worn reserve grounds, it presented the PERFECT venue for some once-in-a-lifetime photo opportunities. The hardest part was staying warm enough to take off gloves, keep the fingers moving while aiming the camera, clicking AND staying steady during the bumpy ride!

Being one of those photographers who takes scads of photos, my hands were bare for quite some time. I hardly noticed until I got so cold that I couldn't properly hold the camera because I was shivering too much. One of my Fishhawk Lake friends loaned me an extra down-filled oversized coat and once I donned that I was able to capture several more elk pictures before calling it a day.



COPYRIGHT © 2011 Gayle Rich-Boxman

We threw out several flakes of hay behind the wagon, while the elk slowly followed us or simply waited patiently while we distributed their supplemental feed. You can see up to 200 elk at a time on a good day of viewing!

Jewell Meadows Wildlife Area is under the auspices of The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. It is a yearly habitat for Roosevelt elk, who present an enormous personage up close and are the largest of the elk subspecies. The average adult female usually weighs between 550 and 650 pounds while adult males average slightly more at 750 pounds and can weigh as much as 1,200 pounds and they usually measure 8 feet in length, but some mature bull elk have been measured up to 10 feet. The males shed antlers and grow them back in less than a year and these weigh 15 pounds each. Their life span is about 10-15 years in the wild.

Usually, when driving by this spacious refuge, about 45 minutes from Vernonia on Highway 202 on the way to Astoria, you will see people parked in the turn offs or two available parking lots with binoculars and cameras. The viewings are normally during winter months through the spring. I saw them this year in September!

A couple of reasons for supplemental feeding of these Roosevelt elk: ODFW [Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife] feeding programs are designed to keep elk in areas where they can be viewed and enjoyed by the public. The feeding programs also help keep elk off adjacent private agricultural property where they could cause damage. They also aid in elk repopulation efforts. Elk from Jewell Meadows have been used in reintroduction and repopulation programs in the Cascade and Coast Ranges and as far away as Northern California and Alaska. http://www.dfw.state.or.us/resources/visitors/docs/Jewell_Meadows_WLA_Broch.pdf

The name "Roosevelt" elk probably came from this: According to the Oxford English



Gayle 2008

dictionary and a number of websites, the subspecies was named in honor of Theodore Roosevelt by Clinton Hart Merriam, who first identified it in the late 1890s. http://www.lewis-clark.org/content/an_roose.htm They had come close to extinction about 1912 and by 1922, they only numbered about 12. Roosevelt and his fellow hunters took the lead in conserving their habitat, thus helping their numbers rise.



Gayle 2008

If you want to get the chance to do what we did and help feed these "Santa's Reindeer-like" creatures here's who to call beginning December 1st through February: (503)755-2264. Reserve your spot on the feed wagon, but bring warm clothes!

You can reach Gayle Rich-Boxman at Fishhawk Lake for your real estate needs by calling: (503)755-2905. Or visit her website: www.lakehomesatfishhawk.com.

Wishing You a
Happy & Healthy
Holiday
from
Vernonia Jazzercise
Penny Costley (503) 429-0196

Happy Holidays
from
all of us at
Vernonia
US Bank
905 Bridge St.
Teresa, Nicole and Juli

Wishing you a safe and happy holiday

from Absolute Marble & Granite