

Over a century after disappearing, wild elk return to Ontario

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After disappearing from Ontario due to over hunting in the 19th century, wild elk have returned to the province thanks to the efforts of the Ontario elk restoration program. According to a report on the program's success, published in the March issue of *Restoration Ecology*, 460 elk were brought from Alberta and released in various Ontario sites between 1998 and 2001.

"The Ontario elk restoration program has met with great success primarily due to the collaborative, multi-partnered approach to wildlife management," says Dr. Rick Rosatte, author of the report and senior research scientist with the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources. Although the transferred elk experienced a 41 percent mortality rate between 1998-2004, the majority of surviving elk were able to reproduce. According to the program's 2004 data, 375 to 440 elk are currently living in Ontario.

Dr. Rosatte is quick to point out that the program faced many challenges. Many of the reintroduced elk did not survive long after being transferred, particularly due to wolf predation, illegal hunting and stress from the transfer process. However, the death rate is decreasing each year, suggesting that the animals are adapting to their new home.

Although pleased with the program's success to date, Rosatte asserts that the work is far from over. "Our challenge for the future will be to develop accurate methods to estimate elk numbers and locations, so that elk can be managed in a sustainable manner, and in a way that minimizes

conflicts between elk and humans."

Source: Blackwell Publishing

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