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HAVE YOU 'HERD'? THREE YOUNG ELK HAVE ARRIVED AT MAYMONT

For the first time in 17 years, Maymont is home to elk, *Cervus canadensis*, one of the largest land mammals in North America. Two females (cows), approximately two years old, and one male (bull), approximately one year old, arrived at their new habitat near the Maymont Farm this spring. In the 1950s, Maymont housed a small herd of elk, but the last of that group died of natural causes in 2002.

“The zoology team is very excited to care for elk at Maymont again,” said Joe Neel, Maymont Senior Manager of Zoology. “These three gentle giants will give us an opportunity to share the species’ story with our guests, from the elks’ localized extinction to current conservation strategies.”

Wild elk lived in Virginia, from the Richmond region to the western border, during the 1600s, but they vanished by 1855, a result of overhunting and loss of winter grazing areas. Around 1900, elk appeared in the Commonwealth again when the owner of Bellwood Farms, located south of Richmond, introduced a pair to his property and successfully produced a herd in captivity. The herd still lives at the site which is now the Defense Supply Center Richmond, operated by the U.S. Army. Meanwhile, a wild elk population is resurging in southwestern Virginia, thanks to conservation efforts that began in 2012.

Due to limited space, the U.S. Army, along with the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (VDGIF), make efforts to keep the herd size small at the Defense Supply Center Richmond, moving some animals to other preserves and qualified animal care organizations. While the relocation of cervids (members of the deer and elk family) in Virginia is strictly regulated, Maymont was approved by VDGIF as one of the few places in the Commonwealth to keep elk in an area for public viewing and education.

“The return of elk to Maymont is significant for our stewardship of the environment and will add to our education programs,” said Parke Richeson, Maymont Executive Director. “We will delight our guests with a unique experience, watching and learning about a rare species, and we also will raise awareness of local elk population restoration efforts.”

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Elk is one of the largest species of the deer family (Cervidae) in the world and is the fourth largest mammal in North America following the American bison, moose and polar/Kodiak bears. Newborn calves weigh about 35 pounds. Adult males average 700 pounds, five feet in height and eight feet in length. Also known as wapiti, a Native American word for “light-colored deer,” elk is categorized into six subspecies: Rocky Mountain, Roosevelt’s, Tule, Manitoban, Merriam’s and Eastern – two of which are extinct the Merriam’s and Eastern.

The new elk at Maymont can be seen daily in their habitat, giving guests a chance to admire a species not otherwise easily observed in Virginia. The habitat is closest to the Maymont Farm entrance at the intersection of Spottswood Road and Shirley Lane in Richmond, Virginia. For more information, call 804-358-7166, ext. 310 or visit maymont.org.

Since 1975, Maymont has been maintained and operated by the nonprofit Maymont Foundation. The Foundation is committed to creating experiences that delight, educate and inspire Maymont’s guests. More than \$3 million must be raised each year through donations to keep the estate and park open to the public.

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