

Aspen Trees:

I once heard that aspen trees are beautiful because of their scars—or the marks on the bark that heal as the tree grows. These marks give each tree distinction. The quaking aspen (*Populus tremuloides*) is one of the most common trees in North America. It spreads out all over the continent. Aspen trees grow particularly well in higher elevations. In the spring and summer their leaves are an assortment of soft greens. In the fall they turn from green to rich yellows and oranges. Oftentimes, aspen trees are the first trees to regrow after fire, erosion, logging, or any other sudden clearings. Although aspens do grow from seeds, they can also grow from root shoot-offs called suckers. Usually one or two seedling trees start a grove of aspen trees, and the rest of the trees are suckers. This allows for quick growth. It also makes aspens very susceptible to insects and disease. If one tree gets a disease the entire grove can die. Because of this susceptibility, aspens have a very short lifespan—rarely longer than twenty years. With their quick growth, and short life, aspen trees are known as succession trees—meaning that they sprout up in harsher environments, become groves, and provide protection for slower-growing trees. By the time those slower-growing trees are old enough to survive without the protection of the aspen grove, the aspen's lifespan is coming to an end. Not only does the tree provide protection to other trees, but they are also an important part for the local fauna. Animals of all kinds find homes and food among aspen trees.

Elk, particularly, love to eat the suckers. In the Manti-La Sal National Forest it is common to find herds of elk meandering through groves of quaking aspen.

Elk:

The elk (*Cervus canadensis*), also known by its Shawnee name wapiti, is the state animal of Utah. It is an herbivore, and one of the largest mammals in North America. Although it is found across North America, its primary populations are now mostly on the western side of the continent. Elk spend their summers grazing in high mountain areas, while in the winter they migrate to lower elevations. In America there have been six sub-species of elk: Rocky Mountain, Roosevelt, Tule, Manitoban, Merriam's (extinct), and Eastern (extinct). An elk, like a cow, has four chambered stomachs. Its diet consists mostly of grass, leaves, twigs, and other foliage. The mating season is in the fall. During this time, bugling plays an important role. The bull elk uses his bugle to attract cows and to warn other bull elk away from his territory. There are often violent conflicts between rival bulls. Elk show aggression through curled lips, grinding teeth, and stamping. When they fight, they use their antlers and legs.

Elk calves are usually born in May or June. Typically a cow elk will have a single calf. However, I have seen—on occasion—a cow with more than one calf. Calves are capable of standing within twenty minutes after they are born. They spend their first few weeks hiding while their mother feeds them.

Because of their abundance throughout North America, elk have often been hunted. On a scale of gaminess, elk meat lies somewhere between beef and deer.

Bekah 9/29/14 7:29 PM

Deleted: A...pen trees are beautiful ... [1]

Bekah 9/29/14 7:29 PM

Formatted: Font:Italic

Bekah 9/29/14 7:35 PM

Deleted: ...imes, aA...pen trees are t ... [2]

Bekah 9/29/14 7:33 PM

Comment [1]: Are you saying that elk particularly love to eat suckers (over other forms of food), or that elk eat suckers more than other animals? Or both? If the first, I would delete the commas. If the second, I would say "In particular, elk love to eat the suckers." If both, I might just leave out the particular.

Bekah 9/29/14 7:34 PM

Deleted: n...tional Ff...rest it is comr ... [3]

Bekah 9/29/14 7:48 PM

Deleted: commonly ...nown by its ... [4]

Bekah 9/29/14 7:37 PM

Formatted: Font:Italic

Bekah 9/29/14 7:37 PM

Deleted: E...k: Rocky Mountain, ... [5]

Bekah 9/29/14 7:39 PM

Deleted: The

When confronted by a hunter a deer will often bounce a little ways before stopping to look back. Elk, however, do not bounce; they run. When a herd runs, it sounds like thunder. For as long as I can remember my family has bow hunted for elk.

Bow Hunting:

Bow hunting is much quieter than rifle hunting. This is mostly because when you hunt with a bow you need to be relatively close to your prey. A bow hunter rarely ever shoots at an animal farther than fifty yards away. Most of the time I won't shoot if the animal is over thirty yards away. In order to get that close to an animal the best method is to find a well-used trail to sit by. I remember, as a small boy, trudging through dew-covered grass trying to get to a trail on a mountain ridge before it was light enough to see. My brothers and I were small enough that we'd be soaked from head to foot from the dew. When my dad would find a spot to sit and wait, we would huddle together, shivering from the damp cold. We'd often try to convince my dad to move higher up the ridgeline. The higher up we got, the quicker the rising sun could reach us. Eventually my dad would relent, and we'd move. Usually around that time the elk showed up. I don't remember my dad ever having a successful hunt when we were little. That was okay. For us hunting was about the tradition: waking up early, going to the mountains, shivering in the cold, warming in the sun, spending time together. People who don't have any experience with hunting often condemn it as a violent sport. For me, and my family, hunting isn't a sport. When someone does shoot an animal it is a spiritual moment. We always eat the meat. We don't mourn, but we are thankful. The first time I shot an elk was right after I was married. My wife and I lived off that elk meat for an entire year.

The Story:

As we moved through the aspens we could hear an elk herd—far off. We meandered in their direction. As I walked I basked in the light that came through the tapestry of leaves. I was at the edge of a meadow when I saw her, two hundred yards away and closing—coming straight for me. As she came closer I could see her dark brown eyes. She stopped fifteen yards away. Her nose twitched because of a fly. She hadn't seen us or smelled us, but she knew something was wrong. I knew that I should shoot, but I waited. I figured my dad would—he wasn't much farther from her than me—but he waited, too. I don't know why I waited. I clearly had the better shot. I had the right angle. I knew I should shoot, but I didn't. I looked at her golden brown fur. I knew the shot was mine. I knew I would kill her. I knew it would be a lot of work, but the meat would feed my family for a year. I saw her muscles twitch. She smelled the air. Why hadn't my dad taken the shot? Why hadn't I? Her muscles bunched. I knew if I didn't shoot she would run. Still I waited. She ran. When she stopped sixty-five yards away from my dad he finally took a shot. I prayed then that he'd hit her. Through the lung. Kill her. Because I knew I should've taken the shot. He missed. She ran away.

Bekah 9/29/14 7:40 PM

Deleted: -

Bekah 9/29/14 7:40 PM

Deleted:

Bekah 9/29/14 7:46 PM

Comment [2]: Since you used this word previously, and it's fairly noticeable, I might recommend changing it to "wandered" or "headed." Although, if you are trying to create a kind of parallelism between the elk hunting for suckers and your hunt for the elk (a kind of circle of life thing), then by all means keep it.

Bekah 9/29/14 7:47 PM

Deleted: ;

When my dad asked why I didn't take the shot I didn't know what to say. He pointed out that the shot had been mine for the taking. I couldn't explain it. I thought maybe that with time I'd be able to explain it.