

# Ministry is rebuilding elk herd

**By ART BRIGGS-JUDE**

Shrinking natural habitat, accelerated outdoor activity, and increased human development sure must make wildlife experts within the Ministry of Natural Resources wonder at times why they didn't major in Dentistry. For not only do they have to face the challenges mentioned above, they often are besieged on all sides by even more. Politicians for example frequently make it difficult for some advocated policies to be introduced, while economics sometimes makes a new programme impossible to maintain. There are also times when well meaning but uninformed people demand action on a certain species that conflicts with the biologist's advanced knowledge. And of course new discoveries, study, and experiences show that in some instances the previous course followed was not always the best.

**A CASE IN POINT** is Ontario's elk herd. These larger than deer "Wapiti" as the Indians called them, were once a native hoofed animal of this province. Rare even as far back as 1880, they had become extinct here by the early 1900's. Several attempts to reintroduce them into Ontario began in 1932 and were for the most part unsuccessful. However from these plantings of Alberta elk, one herd did flourish. This was in the area of the former Burwash Industrial Farm, now a Crown game preserve southwest of Sudbury. By 1950 Ontario's elk herd had increased to some 500 animals and seemed well on the way back.

In 1949 however, elk and domestic livestock in that area were found to contain a parasite called "Liver Fluke." This liver condition thought to have spread from the elk to the cattle, caught the wildlife people in yet another dilemma. Faced with the possibility of causing problems in the beef industry, they reluctantly began to eliminate the elk. During the next three years, 300 were shot by staff members and as a further measure to hasten their demise, the remaining elk were included on the deer hunters licence. Since 1950 the annual kill by hunters has been somewhere between 6 and 12 elk. Incidentally the meat is not affected by this parasite.

But recent re-evaluation of the elk problem has turned up the information that the liver parasite could just as well have been spread from the domestic stock to the wild elk. Buoyed by these new beliefs, the Ministry has now for the first time in 30 years put a ban on the hunting of elk in Ontario. Hopefully this turn around in policy will not come too late. The province's elk population is presently estimated at between 50 and 200 head. The failure of these remaining animals to increase over the years has wildlife experts puzzled. Hunting, predators, and increasing recreational activities in the animals range areas are all suspected reasons for keeping the elk herd down. Certainly when any species reaches a population low all factors work against it. Natural

checks that usually serve to keep it in balance with its surroundings still are responsible for some losses. And when the total animal inventory for that creature is counted in individual pairs, these losses are almost a catastrophe. The ban on hunting elk will certainly help, but the curtailment of outdoor activity in certain areas will not be greeted with as much enthusiasm. Canoeists

and snowmobilers for example are not a problem themselves, but multiplied by increasing numbers could upset the delicate life pattern of these magnificent animals.

And looking at all aspects of rebuilding the elk herd, some predator control may have to be instigated. There are really only two predators that prey on elk, one of which is the timber wolf.

Under certain deep snow conditions where a crust will support a wolf and not an elk a heavy toll may be taken. Younger animals are more vulnerable in spring as the other predator of elk has also discovered. The black bear for example has devised a sneak attack that gets him a full belly without the danger of the elk's armament. Long known to be a lover of honey, garbage,

carion and berries, it is now becoming recognized as a serious predator of such big game as moose and elk and possibly even northern deer.

What the black bear does is simply stay in the area of a cow moose with calf and bide its time. Patiently waiting, remaining concealed down wind, the bear waits for the opportune moment. Now when the cow leaves the calf

behind for only a short distance, the bear charges in at full speed. With one blow it will crush the unsuspecting calf and keep right on running. The angry cow will rush to protect her young, chasing the bear away for some distance. The damage however has already been done and after some time the cow will finally wander away convinced at last it cannot rouse its dead offspring. The black bear still remaining nearby moves in and gorges itself.

The North American Elk bull is a creature of noble appearance, with an immense set of antlers often measuring five feet in length. Western bulls weigh as much as 700 pounds with the cows a couple of hundred pounds less. Legend are the stories of the regal battles between rival males fighting for harem claims. Let the hope prevail that somewhere in the not too distant future we too may witness some of these skirmishes. Not only on television but rather on the rugged quartzite ridges of our own Killarney Provincial Park.



**Car rally champion**

Terry Epps of Elm Rd. Stouffville, is the 1979 Ontario Navigation Champion. He collected a total of 95 points in the best of 6 out of 9 events; 20 Points ahead of his nearest rival.

Jim Holt

## Editor's mail

### UNICEF says thanks

To The Editor:

On behalf of the Ontario UNICEF Committee and the many UNICEF children around the world, I would like to extend thanks to the people of Ontario for their most generous support of UNICEF's work in 1979.

Once again the people of our province have responded with concern and generosity to our fundraising appeal at Hallowe'en and through the purchase of UNICEF greeting cards throughout the year.

developing countries of our world.

The message of 1979 - the International Year of the Child - was that children are the world's most precious resource. The people of Ontario should be proud to know that in 1979, as every year, their support of UNICEF has helped bring a brighter future to many of the world's children.

Sincerely yours,  
MAGGIE SMILEY  
Provincial Chairman  
Ontario UNICEF Committee

As a result of this generosity, \$510,000 has been raised to date from the annual Hallowe'en for UNICEF collections and we are optimistic that we will reach our goal of \$400,000 from our greeting card sales across Ontario.

These contributions, when matched by the federal government through the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) will multiply to \$1,820,000 - monies which will go far in providing safe water supplies, improved nutrition, health care and educational programs for millions of children in the

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**We've decided!**

We are voting for Sinclair Stevens for two reasons: Firstly we trust him to do the best possible job in representing this riding. Secondly we feel that the P.C.'s are the only party who are showing any fiscal responsibility. Also as new homeowners the tax rebate programme would offer some relief in the high cost of owning a home.

Beverly and Dave Hill  
Stouffville

Published by the York-Peel Progressive Conservative Association  
114 Davis Drive, Newmarket, Ontario.

## John Hall - N.D.P. Fuel hike critic

**YORK, PEEL** - Residents in York-Peel rely heavily on cars as their transportation to work, and they shouldn't be punished for it with enormous increases on fuel through the Clark government, a press release from York-Peel NDP John Hall announced recently.

It went on to say that in 1974, "Trudeau promised to make Canadian oil resources at least half owned by Canadians, instead he used tax dollars to subsidize further take-overs by foreign multi-nationals, with billions of dollars each year realized by these companies."

The release said the problem is to "expand the role of Petro Canada, making it a Canadian competitor with the multi-nationals."

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**Ontario Tax Credits Guide 1979**

Or write to: Ministry of Revenue Guaranteed Income and Tax Credit Branch Queen's Park Toronto, Ontario M7A 2B3

**Lorne Maeck, Minister of Revenue**  
**William Davis, Premier**

**Ontario**

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