

# Gene conservation

## Elk registration scheme born

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THE NEW Zealand Wapiti Society is establishing a register of imported North American Wapiti (Elk) to ensure their bloodlines are accurately recorded and to preserve the genetic resource.

Canadian Elk were imported in the early 80s to provide the New Zealand deer industry with a large terminal sire with high velvet weights. These deer have most commonly been referred to as Elk to distinguish them from the feral Wapiti and Wapiti/Red hybrids of Fiordland.

From the earliest importation, the Wapiti Society recognised the need to maintain pure lines of these animals so a well-recorded base population of Elk remained in New Zealand.

To qualify for the Imported Elk Register, animals must have been imported directly from Canada, or be the progeny of imported Elk. All animals must be blood typed for Red x Elk hybridisation.

All New Zealand-born animals are being parentage tested with a relatively new blood test to ensure the pedigree recorded by the breeder is correct.

This will ensure imported Elk breeders can offer breeding stock of known parentage and purity. Breeders and buyers can be assured of the genetic and potential economic value of the animals in question.

Pure Elk genes can be sourced easily and accurately by Wapiti breeders to

provide commercial producers with specific bloodlines which pass on predictable characteristics.

Similarly, Red deer populations which have been rigorously maintained and registered or blood typed will form desirable base breeds for generating F1 animals of consistent type.

Essentially, animals on the Imported Elk Register can be considered a gene pool forming the apex of the Wapiti and Hybrid industry structure in New Zealand.

Owners of imported Elk will receive a detailed pedigree certificate incorporating hybridisation test data and a registration certificate; these are transferable when animals are sold.

An Elk Register subcommittee of the Wapiti Society will adjudicate on cases where parentage verification is in dispute. This, along with the blood tests, ensures known pure bloodlines are maintained for the industry's benefit.

Copies of the register will be available from the New Zealand Wapiti Society or from the Invermay Deer Blood Typing Laboratory.

A decade has lapsed since the first Elk importation, and extensive hybridisation has already taken place within the deer industry.

As producers look for greater venison and velvet yields and faster growth rates, the pure Elk population remains the ultimate source of genetic material. □

### Basic structure of the New Zealand Wapiti and hybrid deer industry

