



Photo by S. N. Leek, March 1911

A BUNCH OF ELK BEING FED MARCH 18TH ON MR. CRAWFORD'S PLACE, ONE MILE NORTH OF JACKSON.

To the right beyond the elk will be noted Mr. Crawford's ranch buildings. It must be borne in mind that for every three elk shown in these pictures one has perished this winter for want of feed. Among this bunch of elk, nearly all cows, it was impossible to count more than 12 spike or yearling bulls, showing the terrible death rate last winter.



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## THE STARVING ELK OF WYOMING

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY S. N. LEEK

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Probably never before in the history of the universe (and I hope never again to be witnessed in the same enormity) has such a sad plight been evidenced among the wild animal kingdom as that which has been witnessed in Jackson's Hole, Wyo., during the past few years. Never until late years have the elk ranges been fenced off like they are now by settlers, and never again, I hope, will the government allow these animals to suffer and die as they have in the past. The late appropriation by Congress and by the state of Wyoming show that the people have at last awakened to the necessity for immediate action—but oh! how long the aid has been a-coming, no one but we who are settlers of the "Hole" and see it with our own eyes every winter can fully realize.

The summer of 1910 was unusually cold and dry, which resulted in a scant growth of grass on the winter range of the elk in Jackson's Hole. An early heavy snowfall in the mountains, with

rain in the valley, caused the herds to come down unusually early. This condition prevailed with light snowfall in the valley till about February 15, 1911, when it began storming, and kept it up until the snow was about three feet deep in the valley. Then, turning warmer, it rained for 48 hours, after which it turned colder, snowed some more and finally froze up, effectively shutting the elk from the little remaining grass. For feed they were confined to the willows (two-thirds of which had been killed by the close browsing and peeling to which they were subjected the two years previous), and to what hay they could steal from the settlers' haystacks.

Before the storm ceased, on February 26th messages were sent to Cheyenne, where the Legislature was in session, calling attention to the need and asking aid. Four days later we received a reply saying that a bill had passed the House appropriating \$5,000 for the relief of the elk. We were further informed that



RATHER CLOSE FOR PICTURE TAKING. NOTHING BUT STARVATION WILL CAUSE WILD ANIMALS TO BECOME SO TAME.



SHOWING HOW THEY CROWD AROUND A LOAD OF HAY WHEN IT ARRIVES TO BE FED TO THEM. A SMALL LOAD THAT SHOULD BE FED TO 200 ELK MUST BE MADE TO DO FOR 1,000 STARVING, HALF-FAMISHED ANIMALS. PHOTOGRAPH TAKEN IN FEBRUARY, 1911.



THE WAY THEY PERISHED AT THE HAY PENS.

On February 7th there were eighteen dead elk around this hay pen. On February 11th (date this picture was taken) there were thirty-nine dead around the crib. A few days later there were fifty, and on March 1st sixty calf elk and two bulls had perished at this place, and at present time (March 18th) the number is not less than 75.

this bill was sure to pass the Senate, and that the Governor would send a man in immediately.

A week later, with no further word from Cheyenne, the calf elk getting very weak and many of them dying, and it being plain to be seen that if any of the calves were to be saved feeding must commence immediately, I sent the following message to several addresses:

JACKSON, Wyo., Feb. 7, 1911.—Unless fed, five thousand elk will perish within two weeks. S. N. LEEK.

This might have been putting it pretty strong, but I thought the end justified the means, and in just four days after sending out the message Sheriff Ward of Evanston, Wyo., arrived at Jackson with authority to act, and three days

later, February 13, the first load of hay was fed to the elk about one mile north of Jackson. Two days later feeding was commenced on my place, three miles south of Jackson, and on Mr. Kelly's place, one mile farther south.

It was now found that very little hay could be procured in the valley, and Mr. Ward was not authorized to offer a sufficient price for hay to induce or justify any stock to be driven to Idaho. So it was impossible to feed all the elk. Feeding was commenced to about 3,000 head of those in the worst condition, and this has since been extended to about 5,000 head, though the very limited hay supply (225 tons) makes it necessary to feed barely enough to keep them alive.



SHOWING BUNCH OF ELK AT PRESENT BEING FED IN MARCH, 1911— ON THE LEEK RANCH.

The lowest place in distant mountain range is Teton Pass, over which during the winter passes the only road to the outside world from the valley. The altitude at base of mountains is 6,300 feet, at summit of pass 8,300 feet. Distance from camera to summit of pass, 10 miles; depth of snow on pass, from 6 to 12 feet. Telephone line follows road from Jackson out. Distance from Jackson to Victor, the next town in Idaho, is about 25 miles. Daily mail over this road.

Feeding was commenced too late to save but very few of the calves, and at this time the hay supply is nearly exhausted. Therefore, if winter does not break soon there will be a very heavy loss yet.

Such, in brief, is the history and situation to date for this year—a repetition of former years. Should I tell you some of the terrible sights we are forced to see—to what extremities the elk are driven for feed, or the settlers to save their hay—you would not believe the half of it. But I submit herewith photographs taken on the ground, that will tell more than words.

Nearly the entire calf crop of three years in succession, with many old elk,

said, "80 per cent." I next asked Mr. George Wilson, another old resident, the has perished for want of feed, and including those killed this loss has reduced the magnificent herds of three years ago to less than half their number at that time. As a result we have, in place of young elk coming on, practically all old cows with very few bulls.

The annual report of the ex-State Game Warden for 1910 says: "About the usual number of elk died in Jackson's Hole last winter." I asked Mr. Crawford, an old resident in the valley, and at present feeding the largest bunch of elk being fed, about what percentage of the elk calves died last winter. He



SHOWING BUNCH OF ELK BEING FED ON MR. KELLY'S PLACE

One mile away in the center distance will be noted the Leek Ranch buildings, and to right center will be noted a neighbor's ranch buildings and his small herd of cattle. Through the gap in center rises the Tetons, just 22 miles away.



SHOWING HOW ALL SMALL TWIGS AND GREEN WILLOWS EATEN BY THE ELK ARE STRIPPED OF THEIR BARK.

At the time this photograph was taken it was apparent by the blood stains about the carcass that the animal's eyes had been picked out before it died. On Mr. Leek's return a few hours later the standing calf had laid down by its dead mate and fallen asleep, with its head curled around at its side, never to awaken in this world.





HUDDLED TOGETHER IN DUMB, MUTE MISERY. NOTHING TO EAT, NO PLACE TO GO.

same question. He said, "85 per cent." Mr. Kelly said 75 per cent. The calf crop each year is about 30 per cent of the whole, while there are very few young elk growing up.

At Mr. Crawford's place there is being fed, as near as they can be counted, 2,250 elk, two-thirds of which number are old cows. The yearlings from this

I drove past this bunch of elk at the Crawford ranch, strung out for nearly a mile in length, and watched carefully, counting just 12 spikes. Among the elk being fed on Kelly's ranch and my place together numbering 2,000 head, I can count about 25 spike bulls. This number of spikes in excess of those in the bunch of elk at Crawford's I think is partly



SOME ARE NOBLE HEADS.

The animals will slip up to the sleigh, take in their mouths all the hay they can hold, and backing off will eat it. This shows a calf elk eating from a bull's mouthful after the latter had gotten a supply.

number of cows (about 1,500 head) had they not perished for want of food, would number 1,000 head, about one-half of which would have been males with spikes. All male elk one year old have spikes that are easily distinguished. All spike bulls are to be found in the herds with the cows.

accounted for by the fact that I fed and saved 33 elk calves at my barn last winter, some of which were probably males. I also saved others by allowing them to stay on the feed ground.

The State Game Warden's report for the previous year says, "About 15 per cent of the calves and a few old elk per-



AND THUS THEY LIE—THE DEAD AND DYING—THE GROUND BEING SPOTTED WITH THEM. AT THIS POINT ELK WERE TO BE FOUND WITH THEIR EYES PICKED OUT AND A MEAL EATEN FROM THEIR BODIES WHILE THEY WERE YET ALIVE.

ished last winter." Yet the young bulls of that age are nearly a minus quantity (not 5 per cent of them being accounted for), while among the about 4,000 elk being fed at the three places named, there is a great disparity of males of all ages.

Are the elk degenerating? Are the calf elk less hardy than in the years past? Does breeding to immature and inferior males cause the calves to succumb to the rigors of winter? These are questions that are interesting to study at this time.

At birth elk calves are probably half males. Now, among the three bunches of elk being fed near my place, probably about 4,000 head, not to exceed 5 per cent of them are males. It is true that many bulls winter high up in the hills away from the herds, and that these are not to be found in the valley now; yet it is a fact that there is a great disparity of males, of all ages. While at birth 50 per cent are males, yet now there is not to exceed 10 per cent males. Non-residents invariably kill males for trophies. Residents kill the larger portion of females, which leaves the ratio about even, as 50 per cent of each sex is shot. Now, the question is, what becomes of this 40 per cent of males?

Buffalo Jones, at one time official hunter in the park, to exterminate the mountain lions, told me he had learned that lions had a preference for male elk, as around a lion's den he had found 19 dead calf elk, killed by the lion, and all were males.

Some years ago when there was practically no law on the game a few of the settlers in the valley conceived the idea of catching elk calves to sell to parks and other places. In this I took part. It was our desire to get about three females to one male, but we found that we in-

variably secured a male in making a capture.

During these hard winters, up to the time that one-half the calves have perished, it will be found that fully three-quarters of the dead calves are males. At the time when the calves are nearly all dead the spike bulls begin to die; next the older bulls, and last the cows.

The males have less vitality, less spirit and less endurance than the females. The mountain lion gets them because they lack that spirit of self-defense necessary to elude his pursuit. When we caught a calf elk and it laid its head out on the snow, allowing itself to be handled and tied without resistance, it was a male. If we found a lone calf among the willows on the creek or among the cedars on the hillside it was invariably a male.

Reduced by hunger till too weak to follow the herd, they drop down by some rock or bush and are left alone with all energy and spirit gone. They become a prey to carnivorous animals, or die a miserable death by starvation. It is not only here in Jackson's Hole that these conditions exist, but wherever there is elk in numbers.

I have a letter from a guide in Cody, Wyo., saying that within a mile on a certain river in the park he counted 50 dead elk, all starved to death. These were nearly all males. I have a letter from a man in Montana saying that hundreds of elk perish by starvation on the sheep range north of the park. These are nearly all males. These are some of the causes of the disparity in male elk, and not the alleged fact that the resident settlers kill one occasionally, or that the non-resident kills a few for trophies, or even that the tusk hunter, in his nefarious practice, kills males for

their teeth. To prevent these things from recurring we must take better care of our elk. It is not game wardens (no one is going to shoot a calf elk for his teeth), but feed, that these animals need.

It is therefore a fact that we, by permitting this annual normal loss among the elk for want of feed, by allowing one-third or one-half of the calves to perish year after year, are destroying the males only, and making it necessary that the breeding must be done by immature and inferior males, thereby raising degenerate, weak calves that succumb easily to hard winters.

It is necessary in breeding farm stock to select the best sires. In breeding among wild animals nature's intention is to eliminate the weaker, inferior animal, for in their fights during the rutting season the stronger, more mature male drives the others away. In the case of the elk there is not enough mature bulls to go around, and this is causing inter-breeding to some extent, all of which has a tendency to create weak offspring.

Now, the state of Wyoming and the

National Government are going to try another experiment—drive the elk like cattle to a better (?) feeding ground. We hope they may succeed, on this proposed new elk range. There were plenty of elk a few years ago, before the settlers took up the grazing ground. They were driven from these ranges, but not as cattle. What new inducements are they now going to offer the elk to get them to stay on the proposed ranges? Will the sheep men give up this new feed ground for the elk? Will any arrangements be made toward winter's sustenance, or will the elk be sacrificed? Would it not be better to refuse permits to flock masters on a scope of ground twenty miles wide along the north park line, in order that a portion of the elk now coming this way from the park could go north to winter? Would it not be better to save the feed on the Grey Bull, Meeteetse, and Stinking Water rivers, to the east of the park, and on the Madison and Snake river tributaries, west of the park, for the elk? If this can't be done, where the elk will go themselves, how can it be done where they will have to be driven?

### IN CUPID'S BOAT

When Kitty and I would fishing go,  
Gay, frank-eyed Kitty and I,  
How light was our little skiff to row,  
How fair was the April sky!

With lip of kissing and laughter low,  
How blithley the waves tripped by,  
When Kitty and I would fishing go,  
Gay, frank-eyed Kitty and I!

Our boat o'erhung by the branches low,  
Her warm hand in mine would lie  
And our lips draw near with a secret aglow!  
Love smiled, too happy to sigh,  
When Kitty and I would fishing go,  
Gay, frank-eyed Kitty and I!

STOKELY S. FISHER.