

Tule Elk in the Del Monte Forest

The third in a series of articles on the history of Del Monte Forest

by Neal Hotelling



Between 1850 and 1870, the once numerous California Tule Elk had been hunted to near extinction and in 1873 fell under state protection. Henry Miller of the Miller-Lux cattle ranch in Kern County nurtured a few, but by 1914 his herd had grown to 400 and was damaging ranch operations. The California Academy of Sciences and California Fish & Game stepped in to help with relocation. Various Elk Lodges assisted and Ney Otis of the Monterey Elks arranged to adopt some of the herd and locate them in Del Monte Forest; five males and five females arrived on October 30, 1914. It may have been one of the last actions approved at Del Monte by A.D. Shepard, the property manager since 1904. The next April, the Pacific Improvement Company replaced him with Samuel F.B. Morse.

Morse appreciated the elk and on November 19, 1915 wrote to F&G: "The elk that we have are doing very well, indeed. I saw them only last Saturday and they were in splendid condition. We need more females and would like very much to receive some from you." It is not clear whether he got them, but by 1920 the herd had grown to 35 head and had started bothering neighbors in Pacific Grove. Mayor Berwick wrote to F&G in 1919, apparently seeking the right to hunt them, which was denied; but relocation was offered as a solution. The relocation documentation is contradictory. In her book *Forest Heritage: A Natural History of the Del Monte Forest* (1972/1980) Beatrice Howitt wrote: "Many years ago, a group of Tule Elk (*Cervus nannodes*) were

brought into the Forest for preservation. Apparently, however, it was not a successful habitat, so they were shipped out to Swanson Ranch in Colusa County in 1922." This description, however, does not match the record.

F&G reports show Del Monte Forest still had an estimated 30 head of elk in 1923. There was a failed round-up attempt in 1923, but in July 1924 three males and 10 females were successfully crated and shipped, not to Colusa County, but to Hearst's San Simeon Ranch. Nevertheless, the elk persisted at Del Monte and field notes from 1936 estimated the population at 15. In October 1937, Morse delivered the last of the Del Monte elk, nine, to the Fleishhacker Zoo in San Francisco ending the 23 year experiment with elk in Del Monte Forest.



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