

35 TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL ELK HUNTING



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jimmie Norris is a lifelong resident of New Mexico and grew up in a hunting family. He fell in love with elk hunting while working as a guide for an outfitter in northern New Mexico and southern Colorado. After getting married, Jimmie settled down, graduated from college, and went to work as an engineer in the high tech industry. For 25 years, every vacation was spent bow hunting elk. Recently retired, Jimmie now maximizes his time outdoors. In between adventures he shares his elk hunting experience through his website

<http://elkhuntersguide.com/>

KEYS TO SUCCESSFUL ELK HUNTING

Elk are some of the most challenging big game animals to hunt. They are typically found in rugged, mountainous, wooded terrain. They are smart, with highly advanced senses that allow them to detect and avoid danger. They make the most of their environment to seemingly disappear when they need to escape. These elk hunting tips are provided to help you overcome the senses of the elk, and make the most of your own.

Elk Senses

Like most wild animals, elk are dependent on their senses for survival. Thus, they have been blessed with abilities far beyond those of us two legged creatures. Overcoming these senses is the basis for hunting. Avoiding detection until you are able to take a shot is the key to hunting success. But it is not easy. Since hunting is not critical for our survival, most of us have not developed the skills required to always be successful. These elk hunting tips are intended to take a close look at each of the elk senses, and provide proven ways to overcome them.

Elk Senses - Smell

Elk have a powerful sense of smell, and they depend on it heavily. If an elk smells a human, chances are that he won't wait for confirmation from his other senses. He will leave the area quickly. This is why it is so important for you to do all you can to overcome this defense. Here are some practical elk hunting tips to help avoid an elk's sensitive nose

Tip 1: Stay Downwind - Always approach an elk from downwind, or with a steady cross wind. Early in the morning the natural thermal action of the air will usually cause the colder, heavier air to flow from the top of a mountain or ridge flowing downward. Take advantage of it whenever possible. Sometimes wind direction is erratic, and seems to flow in circles. Be extra cautious if you find these conditions.

Tip 2: Stay Clean - The old saying goes that "Cleanliness is Next to Godliness". Although that may be debatable, it is certain the cleanliness will reduce your human odor. Take regular showers during elk season, and change clothes often. Even if you are "roughing it" by tent camping, take along a camp shower and use it, making sure that you use scent free hunter's soap. In between showers, use scent free baby wipes to stay clean. Come to camp prepared to hand wash hunting clothes if needed. Again, use scent free laundry detergent.

Tip 3: Control Your Temperature - One of the most important factors in staying clean and minimizing your odor during the hunt is controlling your body temperature to prevent perspiration. Climbing a mountain can generate lots of heat quickly. Ensure that your hunting clothes consist of multiple layers that can be easily shed when you begin to get too warm. A quick “on the fly” adjustment can be made by removing your hunting hat and/or hunting gloves. It’s amazing what a difference that can make.



Elk Senses: Smell

Tip 4: Use Scent Eliminating Spray - Since it is impossible to stay totally clean and not perspire, always keep on hand multiple bottles of scent eliminating spray. Keep one in camp, in your vehicle, and a small bottle in your pack. This product is very effective in minimizing human odor.

Tip 5: Apply Cover Scent - Another approach to defeating an elk’s sense of smell is to try and smell like something other than a human, by using a cover scent. Various scents are available such as pine tree, earth, skunk, etc. and they come in various forms such as sprays or wafers. To be most effective during a stalk on an elk, cover scents should be applied directly to hunting clothing. Spraying into the air will only last a short amount of time as the scent is carried away by the wind. Even though commercial covers scents are supposed to smell “natural”, it may still be a foreign scent to an elk. Try covering your scent with natural scents from the elk’s environment. Odorous plants such as sage can be used, or if you are very brave, step in fresh elk droppings and wipe your boots on your pant legs.

Tip 6: Wear Camp Clothes - Normal camp activities such as cooking and campfires cause odors that are absorbed by your hunting clothes. When you are in camp, change out of your [hunting clothes](#). Hang a rope between trees away from camp to serve as a clothesline. Hang your hunting clothes on this rope and spray with scent eliminating spray to minimize odors.

Tip 7: Wear Scent Trapping Clothing - There are several brands of clothing on the market that employ different methods of trapping odor inside that material. In general, these products are very effective (some more than others), but have the downsides of being very expensive and can be uncomfortably warm during exertion.

Elk Senses - Hearing

Not only can elk hear extremely well, but they have the ability to discern between normal forest sounds, and sounds that come from an alien (to their world) source. Because of this, it is important to not only try and minimize your noise in general, but do your best to eliminate any uniquely human sound. Take advantage of these elk hunting tips to move quietly through the elk woods.



Elk Senses: Hearing

Tip 8: Stay Downwind - “A good wind will cover a multitude of sins”. Just as approaching an elk from downwind will prevent him from smelling you, it will also prevent him from hearing you. This is probably the single most important factor in successful stalking.

Tip 9: Use the Terrain - Use lower terrain such as a stream bed or valley to approach an elk. Not only will this keep you out of his sight, but it will help muffle the sound you make as you walk.

Tip 10: Walk Carefully - Walking quietly through the woods is a skill that is more difficult than it sounds. The key is to watch closely where you place your feet, avoiding sticks, pine cones, gravel, and rocks that might roll down a slope. The whole time you are doing this, you need to be looking around for elk or other animals. Even if you know exactly where your prey is, there may be other animals around that run away and take the elk with them. Dry conditions will make quiet walking much more difficult. Stepping on a bed of wet pine needles will be almost silent, but if they are dry they will crunch like bubble wrap. Pine cones are like a minefield of noise. Go around that tree. Don’t try to climb over a deadfall. There will likely be

branches nearby that snap like a small firecracker. Carefully stepping on open ground, large rocks, or wet clumps of grass will allow you to move quietly. Fresh snow can help muffle your movement, but frozen crunchy snow will be loud.

Tip 11: Whisper - The human voice is certainly not common in the average elk environment. Keep talking to a minimum and then be as quiet as possible. Along this line, if you use two-way radios for communication with hunting buddies, use ear buds to keep the radio from blasting while still allowing you to hear.

Tip 12: Eliminate Clothing and Gear Noise - Before leaving home, dress in your [hunting clothes](#), put on your fully outfitted hunting pack, and carry your weapon and all of the accessories that you will have on the actual hunt. Listen to yourself as you walk across carpet. Try to identify even small noises that your gear or clothing might make. These will be sounds that are not normally heard in the woods, and they will immediately put an elk on alert looking for the source. Some common human sounds include:

Sloshing water bottle – Use a water bladder instead

Zipper pulls – Apply tape to metal zipper pulls or replace with a cord

Clothing material – Never buy hunting clothes that make noise when it brushes against itself

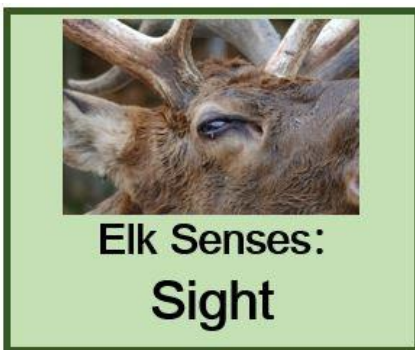
Dangling accessories – Avoid anything that dangles from your neck or your pack such as calls, binoculars, cameras etc.

Metal on metal – Be careful of bumping anything metal, such as part of your weapon against something else that is metal, such as a snap, or even hard plastic, such as a buckle

Extra Tip: Don't bother with Fuzzy boots – For a while there was a fad of wearing fuzzy over boots made of felt and fleece. The idea was that the soft material would muffle any sound made while walking. The problem was that sticks and debris would cling to the material, and fly off while you were walking, likely making more noise than if you weren't wearing them.

Elk Senses - Sight

Elk have been blessed with especially sharp vision, which allows them to quickly detect anything in their environment that is not normal. This will heighten their awareness, and often cause them to leave. Fortunately, there are multiple ways to prevent being seen by elk. Follow these elk hunting tips to avoid being spotted.



Tip 13: Hide Your Movement - The first sight that will draw an elk's attention is a hunter's movement. If you are within line of sight of an elk, and it is looking your way, freeze. Not only should you stop walking, but avoid moving any body parts, including your head. If he is just doing his normal scan of his environment, the elk may look past you without even noticing you are there. If he is looking your way because he has seen or heard something suspicious, be prepared to stay perfectly still for several minutes. Move cautiously when the elk is looking the other way, has his head behind a tree trunk (not just branches), or there is solid cover between you.

Tip 14: Use Cover - Take advantage of whatever cover is available to stay hidden.

That may mean staying behind trees or other vegetation, or wise use of the terrain by staying in the low areas such as ravines.

Tip 15: Stay in Shadows - As you move, always try to stay in the shadows. This makes it more difficult for the elk to detect your movement.

Tip 16: Wear Camouflage Clothing - One of the best ways to blend in with your environment is to wear [Camouflage Clothing](#). The specific camo pattern isn't critical as long as the general shade matches the environment. Some camo designed for eastern hardwoods is so dark that it stands out rather than blends in with the typical western Rocky

Mountain terrain. Be sure to know and follow the particular laws of the state where you are hunting, as some states require a minimum amount of blaze orange for safety.

Tip 17: Avoid Horizons - While standing as a silhouette high on a ridge top at daybreak with an elk call up to your mouth makes a great magazine cover, avoid this if at all possible. Appearing on an open ridge will allow you to be seen for long distances by those keen-eyed elk. As you approach the summit of a hill or a ridge, use a tree or brush for cover, or belly crawl to the top if you must.

Tip 18: Beware Open Meadows - Unless you are trying to move quickly to an elk's known location, and you are confident that the elk can't see the meadow in your path, do your best to avoid crossing in the open. Skirt the edges of the meadow in the tree line. If you must cross the meadow, scan around all of the edges of the meadow and if it is clear, move across quickly to minimize your time in the open. Also, use any cover there might be in the middle of the meadow to stop and scan again before proceeding.

Tip 19: Look for Animals - If you have located an elk and you are now stalking, it's easy to get so focused on the animal's location that you forget to look around for other animals. Since elk are usually in a herd, it's sometimes hard to know where all of the animals are. Other elk, deer, or even domestic cattle can ruin your stalk. Scaring other animals that you aren't hunting can alert the elk to the impending danger. Stay alert and look around.

Hunter Senses

Being aware of the elk's senses is crucial to avoid detection. However, one of the most important elk hunting tips is to make the most of your own senses as a hunter.

Hunter Senses - Sight

Your most important tools in locating elk are your eyes. Knowing what to look for will help you spot those elusive animals.



Tip 20: Movement – Just as elk identify hunters by seeing their movement, the same is true of hunters identifying elk. Unless scared, elk typically don't move quickly. While feeding they usually just take one or a few steps at a time, stopping to look around in between. Scan slowly as you look for elk, looking for any slight movement.

Tip 21: Body Parts - As you are looking for movement, make sure you train your brain to look for any shape out of the ordinary that could be a fraction of an elk. You may just see part of an antler moving or an ear flickering through the limbs. Maybe it is a single leg moving in the underbrush.

Tip 22: Color – Sometimes it is just a flash of tan that catches your eye. Although it is easy to be fooled and see “tree elk” or “rock elk”, make sure to look more closely to see if that patch of tan is an elk.

Tip 23: Glassing – Although human sight doesn't compare with many in the animal world, we can take advantage of technology to help boost our senses. A good pair of binoculars is essential hunting gear for any elk hunter. A spotting scope provides an even closer look. A good technique for glassing an area is to first take a quick scan to see if anything is obvious and easy to spot. If nothing is found, use a grid pattern to closely examine the details. After completing the grid pattern, again scan over the area to see if anything has appeared.

Hunter Senses - Hearing

Often, elk can be heard long before they are seen. In fact, it's not unusual to hear many more elk than you see. What kinds of sounds do elk make? Elk are very verbal animals, so it's common to hear different kinds of “[elk talk](#)”. But there are many other sounds that might indicate an elk is nearby.

Tip 24: Bugle – The signature sound of a [bull elk](#) is a bugle. The only other thing like it in the woods is hunters trying to sound like a bull. The biggest difference between a bull elk bugle and a hunter’s imitation is the power generated by the sheer volume of the elk’s lungs. It’s difficult for a hunter to copy that. However, don’t be too quick to judge whether the bugle you hear comes from hunter or an elk, or whether it is a large or small bull. It’s easy to be fooled, and is best to check it out and visually confirm if possible.

Tip 25: Cow calls – While not as loud as a bugle, cows, calves and bulls all communicate with their distinctive [sounds](#). These “mews” aren’t as loud, so if you hear them you are probably quite close.



Hunter Senses: Hearing

Tip 26: Barks – This is elk talk that you don’t want to hear. When elk are concerned that they are in danger, they will often “bark”. This is a sharp, loud warning sound intended to alert other elk of possible danger.

Tip 27: Hoof beats – While elk aren’t the only animals in the woods that have hooves, they are one of the largest creatures in the woods. Hearing hoof beats could indicate the presence of elk. Unfortunately, the majority of time that you hear this sound, it is going away from you.

Tip 28: Limbs breaking – It is sometimes amazing how quietly elk can move through the woods. But they are very large animals and usually make noise moving through thickly forested areas. The sound of breaking limbs is an indication that something is there, and it could be an elk. But proceed with caution since other things can make similar sounds such as other animals (moose, or domestic cattle), other hunters, or even squirrels knocking pine cones from the trees.

Tip 29: Rocks rolling – Another sound to listen for that may indicate an elk is the sound of rocks rolling down a steep hillside.

Tip 30: Eating – Believe it or not, elk can make significant noise while they are eating. This is especially true when they are eating something besides grass, such as oak or aspen leaves.

Tip 31: Raking a tree – Bull elk will often rub or “rake” trees, especially before and during the rut. This activity is noisy, and can be heard over quite a distance.

Tip 32: Bulls fighting – The clash of antlers can sometimes be heard before and during the rut. It can come from small bulls playfully sparring, all the way up to mature herd bulls fighting to the death. While not a common thing to hear or see while hunting, it certainly can lead you to two bulls.

Tip 33: Hearing Assistance - Just as we use binoculars and spotting scopes to enhance our vision, devices to improve our hearing while hunting are available. These products are not prohibitively expensive, and can certainly be a help, even to those with good hearing.

Hunter Senses – Smell and Feel



Hunter Senses: Smell and Touch

While sight and hearing are your most important tools for detecting an elk, don't overlook the information provided by your nose and your skin. Here are some more important elk hunting tips to take advantage of these important senses.

Tip 34: Smell – If you have never smelled elk, a description is obviously not going to help. But as you are hunting, pay attention to the smells around you. When you encounter fresh elk droppings or urine, take the time to educate yourself so that you can recognize the aroma. When you smell that distinct smell, it may be where elk have been, but it could also be the elk themselves. It’s not unusual to smell elk before you see or hear them.

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Tip 35: Feel – Sight, hearing, and smell aren't your only senses that will benefit you while hunting elk. Your sense of touch will give you very important information: wind direction. However, if you are stalking elk and the wind is light, you may want to use a powder type indicator that will show you the direction of the air currents.

Elk hunting is an incredible opportunity. Most hunters don't even get the opportunity to go on an elk hunt, much less harvest one of these majestic animals. Paying attention to these elk hunting tips will make you a better hunter, and may allow you to get in position for a shot. But even if you don't see an elk on your hunt, take the time to enjoy being in their environment. Appreciate the entire experience.



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SHOULD BE"*

- Fred Bear Bow Hunting Pioneer