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Be sure to drive around our Donor Garden at the prairie entry where we recognize important contributors to this unique wildlife restoration.



Call for more information: **270-924-2000** or **1-800-LBL-7077**  
or on the Internet: **www.lbl.org**  
or write: USDA Forest Service  
Land Between The Lakes  
100 Van Morgan Drive  
Golden Pond, KY 42211-9001

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NATIONAL RECREATION AREA

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*Back from the edge of extinction...hope for a rare landscape*

## Elk & Bison Prairie

at Land Between The Lakes National Recreation Area



## A Drive Through Time

- Begin your visit by touring the Elk & Bison Prairie Exhibit at the Golden Pond Visitor Center, and viewing "Restoring the Land for Tomorrow," our award-winning video starring Karen Grassle ("Ma" from *Little House on the Prairie*).
- Guided tours are scheduled periodically throughout the year. Refer to LBL Calendar for specific events. Call 270-924-2020 for scheduling information.

The sights and sounds of the historic landscape are re-created at three interpretive stops located along the prairie drive. Interactive panels at each stop tell the story of centuries of change, which transformed the native grassland into the hardwood forest so prevalent today.

When you visit these stops, imagine what early hunters and settlers would have been looking for. Be sure to look around for evidence of wildlife. Animal tracks, animal rubs, and paths worn through the grasses are all signs that wildlife have passed by.

**Note:** The animals in the prairie are wild and can be extremely dangerous. Please help maintain their wildness: **Do not** feed them, **do not** try to approach them, and **do not** coax them to approach you.

*Some things to look for at interpretive points:*

**People On The Prairie** - Native people had many uses for prairie plants. Purple Coneflower ("echinacea") remains popular today as a holistic treatment for colds. The fiber of Little Bluestem was used in making clothing. Early settlers found a landscape of woods and grasslands. Land was cleared for homesteads and agricultural fields.

**Plants On The Prairie** - Native grasses and plants were home to many animals, some of which are now extinct. The Carolina parakeet was once common in the South, but was exterminated by farmers who considered the bird a pest because it fed on grains and berries.

**Wildlife On The Prairie** - Elk were hunted by Native people for more than just their meat. Bones and antlers were carved into tools; hides were made into canoes, tepee covers, moccasin soles, and other household items. Later, traders profited from selling bison meat and hides.



**WARNING!** Wild animals are dangerous and unpredictable! Do not approach them, or allow them to approach you. Bison and elk have been known to charge.

Remain in your vehicle if large animals are within 200 feet.

If animals are not nearby and you leave your vehicle, stay on the roadway and remain within 10 feet of your vehicle.

**NO MOTORCYCLES, BICYCLES, OR HORSEBACK RIDING ALLOWED IN PRAIRIE.**

**DO NOT WALK OR HIKE IN PRAIRIE.**

**DO NOT DRIVE OFF ROAD IN PRAIRIE.**

It is illegal to remove antlers or plants from prairie.

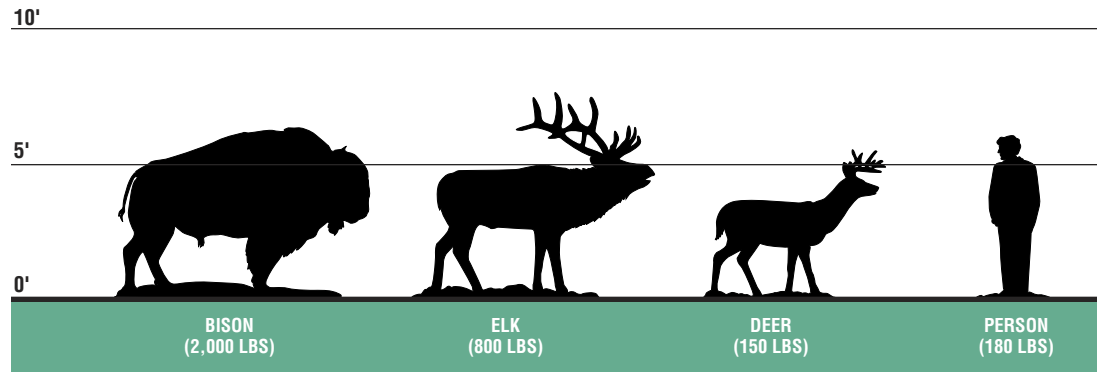


### Will I See Wildlife?

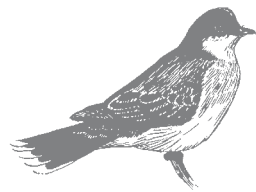
Animals often remain elusive during the daylight hours, especially during hot summer months. The best time to see wildlife is early morning or late afternoon. You may need to drive through the prairie several times to see elk or bison.

Many clues indicate you are in the presence of wildlife:

- Tracks can be seen in damp areas.
- Bison create "wallows" by rolling as they seek relief from biting insects.
- Elk create "rubs" on tree bark when they polish their antlers.
- Bison rub against trees to shed their heavy winter coats. This can strip a tree bare six feet off the ground.
- Animal droppings can be seen along roadsides.



### The Wildlife



EASTERN KINGBIRD

**Elk** — The Shawnee Indian word is *wapiti*, meaning “white rump.” Elk spend most of the day in cover but may come out in late afternoon or evening to graze.



SAVANNAH SPARROW

**Bison** — Bison once ranged from Florida to the Hudson Bay and from Appalachia to the Rockies. They will herd near fresh grass, usually feeding early and late in the day.



INDIGO BUNTING

#### Other wildlife in the prairie include:

Wild turkey, coyote, skunk, rabbit, raccoon, bobcat, bat, box turtle, Eastern kingsnake, garter snake, quail, redtail hawk, and owl. Also, many songbird species, such as indigo bunting, Eastern kingbird, Eastern bluebird, and Savannah sparrow.



EASTERN BLUEBIRD

Illustrations from *Naming the Birds at a Glance* by Lou Blachly and Randolph Jenks. Copyright © 1963 by Lou Blachly and Randolph Jenks. Reprinted by permission of Alfred A. Knopf Inc.

### The Prairie Story

As you enter the Elk & Bison Prairie, you open a door to the past...A world as it appeared to the longhunters and the Shawnee.

That was more than 200 years ago, when vast herds of bison and elk blanketed the landscape, creating broad paths in the land as they migrated.



EASTERN GAMA



BIG BLUESTEM



LITTLE BLUESTEM

### The Vegetation

**Native Grasses** — Periodic fires create an environment where warm-season grasses can thrive. Big Bluestem, Little Bluestem, Eastern Gama Grass, Indian Grass, and Switchgrass are some examples.

**Native Flowers** — Goldenrod, Partridge Pea, Wild Strawberry, Wild Rose, and Prairie Phlox are just a few of the wildflowers growing here.

*Prairie grass illustrations by A. Grotjan.*



INDIAN GRASS

#### PRAIRIE FACT

- In 1790 there were 6 million acres of grassland in Kentucky

Today, we travel many of those same paths—Interstate 24, for example, follows the path of an ancient bison trail.

Native peoples used this land as hunting grounds, periodically setting fires knowing game would be drawn to the new grass. This helped create a land in which grasses could thrive while the encroaching forest was kept at bay.

Early European travelers called the area “barrens,” because the land was mostly “barren” of trees. Settlement changed this delicate balance. Bison and elk were nearly hunted out of existence; native peoples

were forced to move. Absence of fire and grazing allowed oak and hickory trees to take over, crowding out the prairie grasses.

For the past 150 years, a woodland landscape has dominated this region. Then, in the mid-1970s, biologists at Land Between The Lakes noticed small patches of native prairie grasses inside what is now the Elk & Bison Prairie. Setting carefully orchestrated “controlled burns” over a period of years, the prairie grasses flourished. It was then decided to add many of the other elements that made up the original prairie:

Since February 2001, LBL has provided 90 elk for reintroduction in the mountains of North Carolina and Tennessee, through partnerships with the National Park Service and Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency.

elk, bison, and additional warm-season grasses.

The grassland you see now is a demonstration of what once existed in this region. It took less than a generation for the prairie to disappear; it will take many years to bring it back.

The Elk & Bison Prairie at Land Between The Lakes is a cooperative project brought about by the efforts and support of government, corporate and private

groups, and individuals. Please join us in appreciating this glimpse of a rare landscape in the early stages of renewal.

#### PRAIRIE ANIMAL FACTS

- Elk antlers can grow up to one inch a day in the summer
- Bison can run up to 35 miles per hour

#### THROUGH THE SEASONS

*Our prairie is ever-changing. Over time, as grasses and wildlife become established, the landscape will slowly be transformed back the way it once was 200 years ago. Seasonal changes can be dramatic as well. Here's what's happening in our prairie, through the seasons:*

**Spring** Spring is a time for new life! During March and April, we begin the process of controlled burns, which helps maintain the prairie by removing dead grass and deterring the growth of trees.

Elk and bison will shed their winter coats at this time. Many animals will seek out “rubs”— trees, stumps, or rocks on which they rub to help the shedding process along.

During May, the first bison calves begin to appear. Bison calves stay close to their mothers. Elk calves are born in late May or June. Elk keep their newborn calves hidden in vegetation until the young are strong enough to keep up with the herd.

**Summer** It's prime growing season for grasses in the prairie. Some prairie grasses are nearly two feet high by July, and will be eight feet high by early September.

During the hottest days, both elk and

bison will seek relief by finding shade trees or taking a dip in a pond. Wildlife is most active just after sunrise and just before sunset. If you are visiting during the day, you might want to return at one of these times.

Biting insects are a nuisance to wildlife in the summer; elk and bison will “wallow” in dust or mud to protect themselves. A bison wallow can be more than 15 feet wide and a foot deep.

Bison breeding season is from July to October. Bulls can be especially aggressive at this time and extra caution should be taken when in the presence of bison.

**Fall** In early autumn you may see prairie wildflowers in bloom—purple blazing stars, partridge pea, and butterfly milkweed.

Autumn is also a busy time for prairie wildlife. Elk begin “bugling”—their mating call—in September and October.

Elk will rub the velvet from their antlers, in preparation for mating season. Watch for trees rubbed bare of bark—a sign that an animal had polished its antlers recently.

In cool weather, snakes seek out the warmth of our blacktop road. **Please do not run over or harass the snakes!** Reptiles are very important to the prairie ecosystem.

**Winter** The bare landscape of winter heightens wildlife viewing opportunities. Elk and bison will have their full winter coats by December. Elk will browse on dried grasses, twigs, bark, and mast (acorns). Bison will eat grass through the winter months.

The landscape looks markedly different in winter. Trees and shrubs lose their leaves, opening the landscape into wide, scenic vistas. This also makes wildlife more visible, especially on cold days when they feed throughout the day.