



ARTICLE

Surprise Tule Elk Sighting in Pinnacles National Park

[Pinnacles National Park \(https://www.nps.gov/pinn/\)](https://www.nps.gov/pinn/)



In early March, staff spotted two young male tule elk in Pinnacles National Park! As far as park biologists are aware, this is the first documented record of the species in the park.

NPS / Gavin Emmons

April 2022 - It's typical to see tule elk in Point Reyes National Seashore, where a herd was first reintroduced in 1978. But it was quite the surprise when, in early March, staff spotted two young male tule elk in Pinnacles National Park! As far as park biologists are aware, this is the first documented record of the species in the park.

Tule elk are the smallest of the North American elk subspecies, and are endemic to California. Before the Spanish arrival they were likely the dominant large ungulate in the state, and Pinnacles would have been well within their range. By the 1870's, though, the species was considered extinct due to unregulated and unrestricted harvest. Luckily a pair of tule elk were found on a ranch in 1874, and the rancher, Henry Miller, single-handedly saved the species by protecting the herd until their numbers grew. Genetic analyses support the possibility that tule elk today may all descend from only two or three breeding individuals! With lots of help from relocation projects over many years, the species' population is now at over 5,000 animals.



Biologists don't know why these two young males passed through the park. Perhaps a nearby herd is healthy and expanding its range. Or maybe drought has affected forage so much they are moving farther in search of food.

NPS / Gavin Emmons

In the last few decades tule elk have been seen within a few miles of Pinnacles National Park, and large herds are found within 50 miles in Priest Valley and Pacheco State Park. Biologists don't know why these two young males passed through the park. Perhaps the local herd is healthy and expanding its range. Or maybe drought has affected forage so much they are moving farther in search of food. We may never know, but we can all look forward to seeing what the future holds for tule elk at Pinnacles!

For more information

- Contact Pinnacles National Park Wildlife Biologist [Paul G. Johnson](https://www.nps.gov/common/utilities/sendmail/sendemail.cfm?o=5B84CEB7A2D9A0B49AA81CA1D919BBBE089A4999&r=/articles/000/sfanblog_surprise-tule-elk-sighting-in-pinnacles-national-park.htm) (https://www.nps.gov/common/utilities/sendmail/sendemail.cfm?o=5B84CEB7A2D9A0B49AA81CA1D919BBBE089A4999&r=/articles/000/sfanblog_surprise-tule-elk-sighting-in-pinnacles-national-park.htm).

See more from the [Bay Area Nature & Science Blog](https://www.nps.gov/rlc/pacificcoast/blog.htm) (<https://www.nps.gov/rlc/pacificcoast/blog.htm>).



pinnacles national park

sfan

blog

california

san benito county

mammals

tule elk

Last updated: April 28, 2022

Was this page helpful?

☐ Yes

☐ No



An official form of the United States government. Provided by [Touchpoints](https://touchpoints.app.cloud.gov/)
(<https://touchpoints.app.cloud.gov/>)