Wandering elk finds new home in Charleston

THE JOURNAL STAFF

CHARLESTON — After efforts to encourage the infamous elk that has been spotted in Oconee, Pickens and Greenville counties to return to its home herd in North Carolina proved unsuccessful, the animal has been relocated once again.

The elk is currently residing at the S.C. Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism's Charles Towne Landing State Historic Site, where it's slated to become part of the site's animal forest exhibit, according to a new release from the S.C. Department of Natural Resources

Officials say it will be some time, however, before visitors to the Charleston site will be able to see the elk, which will remain under observation in a quarantine pen until it's determined that it is safe for it to join the exhibit's other animals.

People began spotting the roughly 500-pound young bull elk in late

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ELK: Tranquilized last week in Oconee County neighborhood

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October. Biologists believe the elk was pushed away from his home territory in Haywood County, N.C., by larger bulls.

Despite repeated warnings not to approach or feed the elk, word of the rare visitor quickly spread on social media, and photos and video of people doing just that began to circulate.

"This elk is a wild animal and not domesticated," S.C. Department of Natural Resources wildlife biologist Tammy Wactor said. "It has become accustomed to people, so it will allow people to approach it, but it is unpredictable, and this behavior can create dangerous situations."

In order to protect the elk and the public, biologists from the SCDNR and the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission eventually relocated it to a remote part of the mountains in Oconee County. When the elk then moved on its own to a spot near Devils Fork State Park, biologists were hopeful that it might keep moving north and rejoin the herd.

That, however, never happened, and it was tranquilized Dec. 16 in a neighborhood south of Devils Fork.

"It had been in this neighborhood for the past two weeks, and did not show any sign of moving," Wactor said. "It had become more aggressive and was showing no sign of going back to North Carolina. SCDNR biological staff decided it was time to move it, and Charles Towne Landing was willing to accept the animal."

Elk were present in the mountains of the Carolinas and other Southeastern states at the time of European colonization, but by the 1800s, overhunting and loss of habitat led to their disappearance.

Elk were reintroduced to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park in 2001, and that herd has grown to approximately 150 animals Legislation passed in 2009 by the S.C. General Assembly protects elk in the Palmetto State, in anticipation that they might eventually begin to show up here.



SPECIAL TO THE JOURNAL

An elk spotted around the Upstate in recent months was tranquilized in Oconee County last week and relocated to Charles Towne Landing in Charleston, according to S.C. Department of Natural Resources officials.