

# Buffalo ~ American Bison



## Interesting Facts

**Height:** 5-6 ft.

**Length:** 6-7 ft.

**Tail Length:** 3 ft.

**Weight:** 800-2000 lb.

**Maturity:** 2-3 years.

**Mating:** July to October.

**Gestation:** About 9 months.

**No. of Young:** Normally 1 born in May weighing about fifty pounds.

**Horns:** Both the male and female have horns.

**Habit:** Active during daytime; lives in herds.

**Diet:** A grazing animal, feeds mostly on grasses.

**Lifespan:** 15-20 years, may live up to 30 years.

**Family:** Classified as "Bison bison". Common name "Bison". Related to domestic cattle.

During the 15th century, buffalo dominated the American plains with numbers over **60 million**. The Plains Indians followed herds sometimes up to 200 miles across the prairies. The Indians depended on the animal for survival and used every part of the buffalo. They used: hides for tipis and clothing, bones for tools and toys, the meat for food, tendons and muscles for sinewy sewing thread and bowstrings, horns for cups and spoons. They used the brains for hide tanning, the eyes for liquid paint thickener, and the buffalo chips for fuel and baby powder.

The destruction of the animal, leading almost to extinction, began in 1830 when government policy advocated their extermination to subdue the "hostile" tribes through starvation. By 1900, less than 1,000 buffalo remained. But thanks to federal regulation and careful breeding, there are now about 30,000 - 65,000 free ranging buffalo in national parks and privately owned rangeland. (Yellowstone, Custer, Bear Country U.S.A, etc.) The American Bison Society was founded in 1905. The National Bison Range was established in Montana in 1909.

A buffalo's habitat varies. They live primarily on plains, prairies, river valleys and sometimes forests. While we often call these animals buffalo, their proper name is bison. True buffalo only live in Africa (the African Cape Buffalo) and Asia (the Asian Water Buffalo).

The American buffalo is the largest terrestrial animal in North America. Bulls can weigh up to 2000 pounds, but are very good swimmers in spite of their weight. A buffalo will eat anywhere from 2% to 3% of their body weight "A DAY!!!" This means for every 1,000 pounds, 20 to 30 pounds of food is needed. Bison can weigh up to 2,000 pounds so if you do the math, that is over 60 pounds of food per animal per day.

During breeding season, the bulls will fight for cow harems. They stand 20 feet apart and charge colliding foreheads with no apparent injury. This continues until one gives up. Bulls have little time to eat during the breeding season and can lose up to 200 pounds. Gestation is anywhere between eight to nine months. Calves are born in late spring and are light tan or Carmel color. After a few days of birth, the calf can keep up with the herd and follows it's mother until the next spring. As they grow older, they develop heavier and darker hair and the characteristic hump. Buffalo are closely related to cattle and have been successfully crossbred with their domestic cousins to produce a "beefalo."