

Where wild bison roam

Our Wild World Safari has taken us to see endangered species across the globe.

This week, we travel to Europe to see how one animal has returned from the brink of extinction.

We picture bison in the American West. But Europe also has a species of bison. American bison are called buffalo. European bison are called wisent.

Bison roamed across Europe from the British Isles to Siberia in ancient times. They lived in the forest that covered much of the continent.

As the number of people and farms in Europe grew, the number of bison declined. By the 15th century, bison lived in only a few forests. They found protection in royal hunting forests in Poland.

A hundred years ago, 700 wild bison lived in the Bialowieza forest in Poland. They were all killed during World War I.

Only 50 bison lived in scattered parks and zoos by 1925.

Polish scientists got busy. Poland had three bison in a duke's private park. They purchased a few more from zoos in Germany, Denmark and Sweden. They established a breeding station in the forest.

Starting with just 12 animals, they have built the population back to about 3,000.

The first bison were released back into the forest in 1952. In 1957, the first calf was born in the wild.



Photo by Mateusz Szymura, Bialowieza Forest

Do these animals look like buffalo in Yellowstone Park? These European bison live in the Bialowieza forest in Poland. Wisent are cousins to American bison.

Bison eat trees, leaves, twigs, bark and berries. The herd is also fed oats, hay and sugar beets in the winter.

European bison are lighter in weight than their American cousins. They have longer legs and shorter hair. American bison eat grass instead of leaves.

Wisent and buffalo share a return from near-extinction.

When Christopher Columbus came to America, there were over 30 million bison. They were hunted for their meat, hides and sport.

By 1888, fewer than a thousand American bison were left.

A small herd survived in Yellowstone Park. Bison preserves were set up in South Dakota and Oklahoma.

The American bison has made a huge comeback. Today, there are almost 350,000 buffalo in the United States.

The bison in both Poland and America prove that we can help save endangered species



Geography Match

Match these European countries with their capital cities.

Poland	Berlin
Germany	Dublin
Ireland	Warsaw
France	Rome
Italy	Madrid
Greece	Vienna
Austria	Paris
Spain	Athens



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- Write about your favorite animal or place from our Wild World Safari.