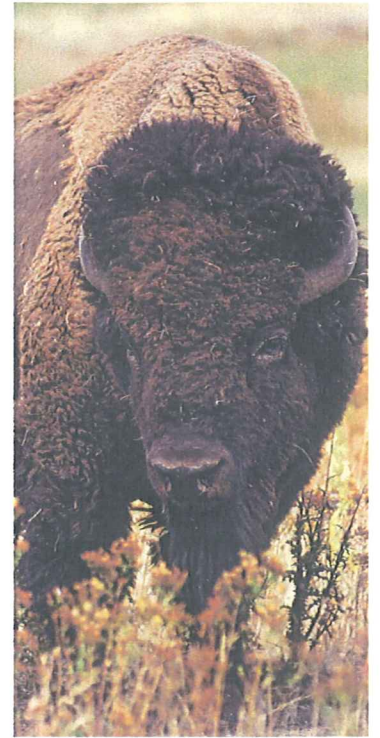


Buffalo or Bison?

The animal at home on the range in North America is... the bison. Although there are technically two breeds of buffalo (the Asian water buffalo and the African buffalo), the use of the word buffalo applied to the *Bison bison* (Latin) has been so widely used that it is considered by some people to be an acceptable synonym. It is believed that the species was misnamed "buffalo" by French traders who called them "les boeufs" (oxen), and the English term developed from there.

In North America, the two subspecies of the North American bison are the plains bison and the wood bison. The plains bison is the smaller of the two, and has a more rounded hump than the square hump on the wood bison. Amazingly agile, these massive beasts can weigh up to 2,000 pounds, reach speeds up to 40 mph and scale 8-foot fences while running.

Both male and female bison have horns, which are used for defense and in fighting for status in the herd. Although they appear to be slow moving and docile, bison will attack if provoked. The wood bison is protected under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species.



Why a bison?

Bison originally ranged throughout much of North America. Estimates were that there were between 20 and 30 million bison before the mass slaughters of the animal in the 1870s. This slaughter was driven by a fad for the fur and a desire to eliminate a major food source for Native American Indians. Today there are around half a million bison, but most of these are the descendents of bison that were crossbred with cattle to be raised as livestock.

Bison are herbivores and eat grasses and sedges. In the wild, bison range widely and never overgraze an area. The plains bison is considered as important to the prairie ecosystem as is natural fire.

Why Metro Parks?

Although typically associated with the Great Plains, bison were in Ohio when European settlers arrived. They grazed in the grasslands and prairies of the Darby Plains. Metro Parks has restored more than 600 acres of prairies using only seeds native to the Darby Plains. What better way to give people an inkling of the role the prairie played in our history than to bring back America's largest land mammal to Battelle Darby Creek Metro Park.

Why me?

A proud symbol of fortitude and resilience, the American bison is a true survivor, enduring even the most extreme conditions with strength, stamina and agility. You can help create resources about the bison for visitors to the parks by supporting the Stewards of Metro Parks. The Stewards raise funds, primarily through membership, to support special projects in your Metro Parks. Bringing bison back to the parks requires many things: large space, fences, observation platforms, winter shelter, food and veterinarian care. The Stewards of Metro Parks is committed to helping the park system by raising funds for interpretive signage and support for the nature center to be built in Battelle Darby Creek Metro Park. The Stewards will also partner with schools to create educational programs and activities around this magnificent native animal.

To join the Stewards of Metro Parks and to touch a park, please visit the website at www.stewardsofmetroparks.org

Bison Facts

Scientific name: *Bison bison* or American bison

How big are they? A bull can be 6 feet high at the shoulders and weigh up to 2000 pounds. A cow is closer to 4 1/2 feet high at the shoulders and 900 pounds. Calves weigh about 45 pounds at birth.

How much space do they need?

Each bison requires between one and two acres of space if there is no supplemental feeding.

What do they eat?

Bison are vegetarians. Their diet consists mainly of grasses and sedges.

What happened to the bison?

Bison were hunted in this area by the Native Americans, but not to the extent that they were by the Plains Indians in the western U.S. With the arrival of settlers, the bison population rapidly declined.

What about reproduction?

The gestation period for bison is 9.5 months. Female bison usually carry a single calf. The calves are typically born April through June. Bison cows usually do not have their first calf until they are three years old.



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Stewards of Metro Parks
supports and furthers the work
of our Metro Parks