



Plains Bison

Bison bison

Description: Bison are the largest land mammal in the western hemisphere. They once numbered in the millions when settlers first came to the Americas, and then were hunted to near extinction. Reintroduction programs have now raised the number up to about 200,000. These are huge animals weigh up to 2,000 pounds. They have very thick fur to help protect them from the harsh winter in northern America. Their skulls are very hard and can be used for battering ram when fighting off predators or fighting for mates.

Range: They are found in North America mainly in the Great Plains, but range into Canada and even Alaska.

Habitat: As their name gives away, the Plains Bison live on open grasslands, where they can easily feed and watch for predators.

Natural Diet: In the wild they will feed mainly off the grass their herd roams over.



Zoo Diet: At the zoo, they are fed hay and alfalfa and graze on the grass in their exhibit .

Behavior: Bison live in groups called herds. Male bison, bulls, are in charge of the herd and determine where they graze that day and protect the other members of the herd. Unlike domestic cattle, who turn their backs to a storm, Bison will face into a storm because of the incredibly thick fur on their faces.

Reproduction: Males don't reach sexual maturity until they are 6 years of ages, females mature much more quickly and can mate by the time they are 2 or 3 years old. The mating season lasts from July through September, during this time, the males will tend a female which means he will separate her from the group to mate. A female will give birth to one calf after about nine months and will not be weaned until 7 months.

Conservation Status: Near threatened, but populations are stable.