

A photograph of a herd of European bison in a forest. The bison are dark brown with thick fur and large, curved horns. They are standing in a grassy area with trees in the background. The lighting is soft, suggesting a forest environment.

Rewilding
Europe®



The Rewilding Bison Action Plan

Rewilding Europe supports the efforts to bring back the European bison to its ancestral lands. Establishing new wild bison populations in several of our Rewilding areas, and assisting the return of bison also to other places in Europe.

Ever rarer than the black rhino...



The European bison is one of the most endangered large mammals in the world. With less than 3,000 animals remaining in the wild, it is even more threatened than the black rhino. Furthermore, there is still not even one single long-term viable bison population in the wild.

The bison, or Wisent, is a very impressive animal, weighing up to over 1,000 kg, which once used to live all across Europe, except some parts of Spain, Italy and northern Scandinavia. Contrary to popular belief, it is really an animal of the open and semi-open lands, but it also likes forests or woods nearby, for shelter and food during parts of the year.

Even though the bison primarily is a grass eater, an important part of their diet also comes from browsing of bushes, bramble and trees. Bison eat up to 60 kg per day and have real impact on the vegetation, keeping open lands open and creating a mosaic savannah landscape. Besides grazing in the front end, it tramples in the middle, wallows in mud holes, rolls in sand pits that it has kicked up, and then fertilizes from its rear end. All of which has great importance to the variety of Europe's ecosystems.

After the Ice Age, man hunted the bison so intensively that the bison was forced into the most remote corners of Europe. The last remaining bison in the wild were killed by soldiers

and poachers during World War I and the Russian revolution. The last wild bison in Europe died in Białowieża in 1919, while the last wild bison in the Caucasus died in 1927.

The species only survived thanks to 54 animals that were kept in different zoos, originating from only 12 founder animals. In 1954 the first bison were released back into the wild in the Białowieża forest in Poland, followed by reintroductions in several countries. But despite soon 100 years of conservation efforts for the bison, it is still a species in great danger.

The main problem is that very few areas yet volunteer to receive bison for reintroductions. There is also lack of knowledge about the animal, there is habitat loss and fragmentation, a narrow genetic base that leads to weak resistance against disease, and a lack of European strategy which is then supported by many national authorities.

In the Rewilding Europe vision, large herds of bison will once again roam Europe, living side by side with other keystone species like wild horses, aurochs, deer and predators like the wolf.

Rewilding Europe intends to help the bison come back, all across its former range.

- We aim to help the European bison quickly come back to natural densities in some key ecosystems, and preparing new areas for the species to expand into.
- We intend to help establish at least five herds of >100 animals before 2022, in rewilding areas that are specifically selected for this purpose.
- Leading to at least one connected large population of >1,000 animals by 2032.
- We will actively invest in business development around the return of the bison, directly linking bison conservation with local economic benefits.
- Since most Europeans don't even know that the bison exists, we will show it to them, through a long mass-communication campaign.
- We will run a Europe-wide fundraiser to help finance these measures and we deeply appreciate all support.
- We will of course work very closely with the bison experts and their organisations, like EBCC, EBSF and EBSG.
- We invite also all other willing and able partners (land owners, land managers, scientists, hunters, forestry officials, National Parks etc) to join us in this trail breaking endeavor.

We intend to make the European bison a living symbol for a new, modern relation between man, wild nature and wildlife in Europe.

Making Europe a Wilder Place