

Name: _____

American Bison

By Guy Belleranti

People often use the words “bison” and “buffalo” to mean the same animal. However, true buffalo are the Asian water buffalo and the African (Cape) buffalo. Their horns form huge sweeping curves. The American bison, and its cousin the European bison, have shorter curved horns. In addition, unlike buffalo, bison have beards and huge muscular humps on their shoulders. Still, although bison aren’t buffalo, the two are related. They belong to the same family of animals as cattle, goats, and sheep.

Let’s look closer at the American bison.

Bison are the heaviest land animals in North America. Some bulls, or male bison, weigh 2,000 pounds. Bison often live and travel in herds. For most of the year, bulls are separate from the cows, or female bison, and their calves. In summer’s breeding season, bulls join the female herds. Bulls fight each other for dominance. They bellow, shove, and butt heads. They also roll in the dirt to show strength and to leave their scent.

Usually only one calf is born to a mother bison. It has red-orange fur and weighs about 50 pounds. After a few months, the calf’s hair begins turning dark brown. Its horns and shoulder hump begin to grow too.

And speaking of the hump – it supports the bison’s huge head. In winter, these furry beasts use their heads like snow plows, swinging them from side-to-side to clear pathways and uncover vegetation to eat. Bison are grazers, which means they prefer eating



grasses. They also eat sagebrush, berries, and other plants. Like cows, they have four-chambered stomachs and bring food back up to their mouths to chew again.

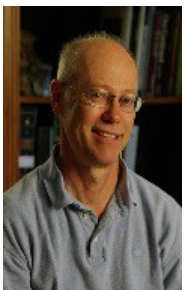
At one time millions of bison roamed the plains, prairies, and river valleys. However, by the late 1800's, bison were almost extinct, killed off by settlers. Those that remained were primarily in Yellowstone National Park. Conservationists, Native American nations, ranchers, and the government began working to protect them. Yellowstone is still the best place to see them. They're also in state parks and preserves. Some ranches raise bison for their meat.



In May 2016, the American bison was named the National Mammal of the United States. It joins another one-time almost extinct animal, the bald eagle, as official symbols of the United States.

A few more bison facts:

- Bison were important to Native Americans. Not only did they provide food, clothing, shelter, and tools, but they were important in cultural ceremonies.
- Bison have poor eyesight. However, their hearing and sense of smell is excellent.
- Although huge, bison are very agile and fast. They can run 35 miles an hour!



About the Author

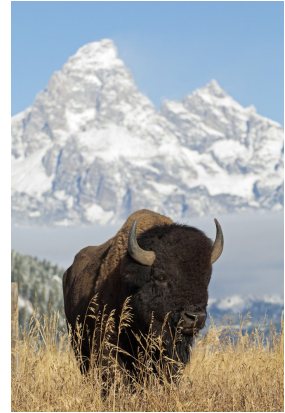
Guy Belleranti is an author of fiction, poetry, articles, puzzles, and humor for children and adults. He also works as a docent at the Reid Park Zoo in Tucson, Arizona. The information in this article comes from his experiences teaching children about the wild animals at the zoo.

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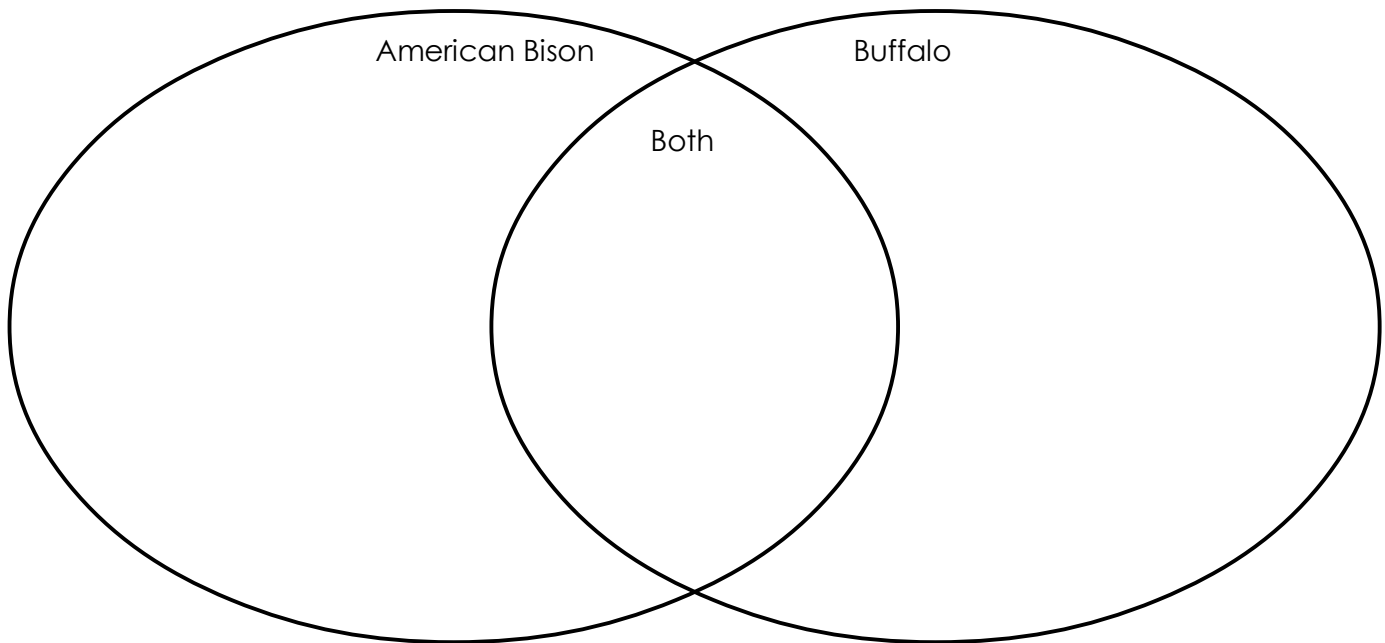
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1. According to the article, what is unusual about the digestive systems of American bison?



2. Complete the Venn Diagram below to show the differences and similarities between American bison and buffalo. List **two differences** and **one similarity**.

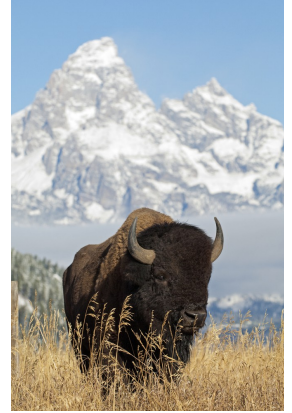


3. Based on the information in the article, which event in American history wiped out most of the American bison?
- a. the arrival of the Pilgrims b. the American Revolutionary War
c. the westward movement of the settlers d. the American Civil War
4. Name one place you could go today to see an American bison in the wild.

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Match each vocabulary word from the reading passage with the correct definition.

_____ 1. bellow

a. female bison

_____ 2. extinct

b. able to move quickly and easily

_____ 3. sagebrush

c. a wild ox with large sweeping horns found mostly in Africa and Asia

_____ 4. dominance

d. male bison

_____ 5. conservationists

e. no longer in existence

_____ 6. agile

f. roar loudly, aggressively

_____ 7. preserves

g. people who advocate for the protection of nature and wildlife

_____ 8. cows

h. a shrub in North American similar to a daisy and eaten by bison

_____ 9. bulls

i. areas set aside for wild animals to live in safety

_____ 10. buffalo

j. power and influence over others

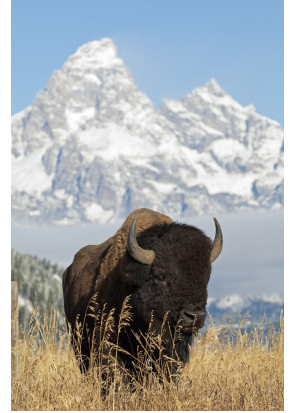
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In the article, “American Bison,” you learned that there used to be millions of bison roaming the plains of the American West, but the movement of settlers into their territories caused most of them to be wiped out.

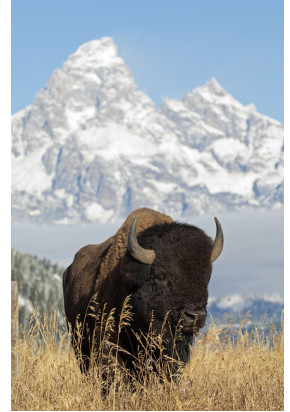
Choose another animal species that was affected by human settlement. You can describe an example from the past or the present. In your answer, be sure to describe how human activity has harmed that animal species. Make one suggestion how we can protect the remaining members of that species today.

[illegible]

ANSWER KEY

American Bison

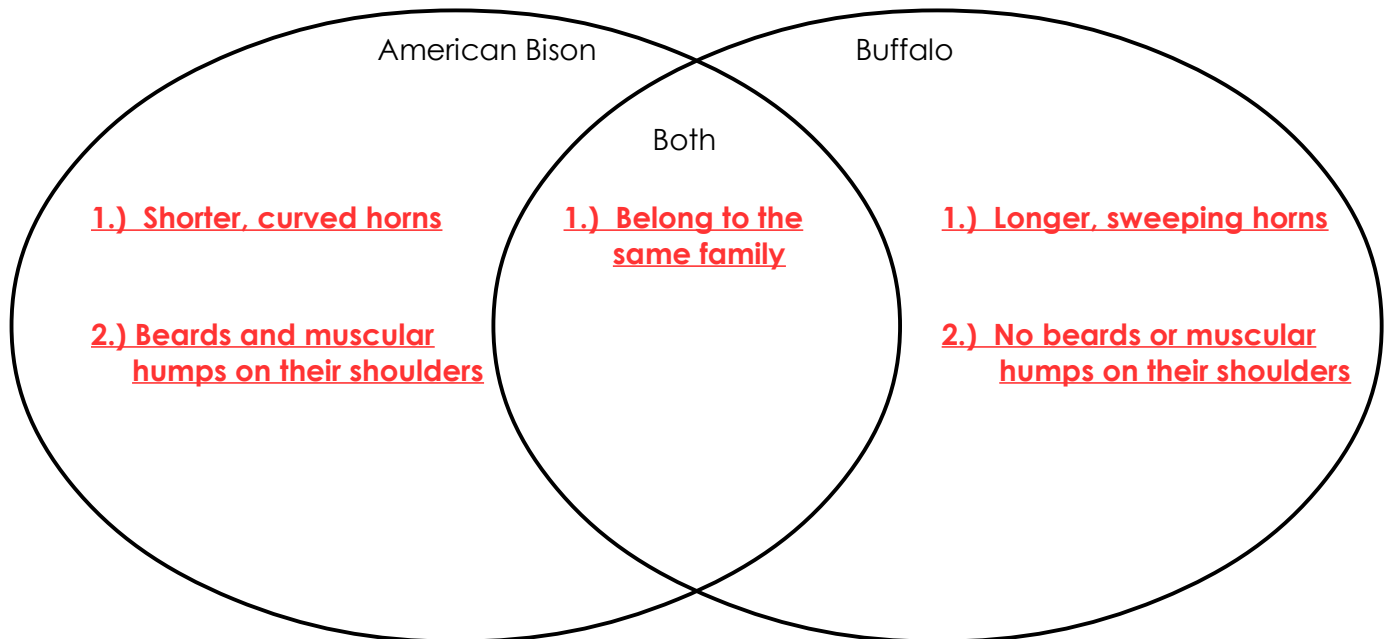
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1. According to the article, what is unusual about the digestive systems of American bison?

American Bison have four-chambered stomachs and they bring their food back up to chew it again.

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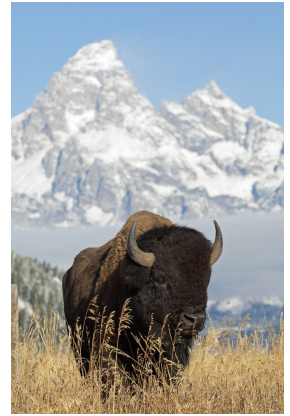


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- a. the arrival of the Pilgrims
- b. the American Revolutionary War
- c. the westward movement of the settlers
- d. the American Civil War
4. Name one place you could go today to see an American bison in the wild.

Yellowstone National Park, state parks, ranches, preserves

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