



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

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# National Bison Range (/refuge /National\_Bison\_Range)

National Bison Range | Montana

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## Bison Quick Facts



While technically we have bison in North American, the term buffalo has been commonly used for bison since the late 1700s, during the time of the fur trade. Lewis and Clark referred to them as such in their journals. And Native American tribes have terms for bison in their own languages. Locally, the Salish use the word **Q<sup>w</sup>ey Q<sup>w</sup>ay** (pronounced kwi-kway) and the Kootenai use **Kamqu'qukul 'iyamu** (pronounced kam koo koo kool ee ya moo). Other tribes have terms for bison in their own languages, too.

## European Bison



Whether you call them bison or buffalo, you should clarify by putting North American in front of either word. Not only will this make clear that you are not referring to the true buffalo of Africa or Asia, but will distinguish your reference from the European bison. Called a **wisent**, the European bison (*Bison bonasus*) are close relatives of the American bison. They have been depicted in ancient cave art at such famous sites as Lascaux in France. The largest living

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herds are found in Poland's Bialowieza National Park, where Europe's last remaining primeval forest exists.

## Bison Moods



You can judge a bison's mood by watching its tail. When it hangs down and is switching naturally, the animal is usually calm. But if the tail is sticking straight up, watch out! It may be ready to charge. The cow bison in the photo to the left is warily watching the photographer while she nurses her new calf. You can tell she's a bit upset because her tail is up and she is very alert.

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### *Bison Conservation*

*All it takes is the sight of red calves dotting the early spring landscape to understand that the Fish and Wildlife Service mission "for future generations" does not just refer to people.*

## How fast can it go?



Bison can run at speeds approaching 35 mph which is as fast as a horse. And they are also extremely agile, able to turn quickly and jump high fences. So do not approach bison – view them from the safety of your vehicle.

## Humps



Male bison can weigh as much as a ton. Typically, mature males weigh from 1500-1800 pounds with females about half that weight. When born, calves can weigh 30 to 70 pounds. Calves are born without a hump. The bones making up the hump grow during its first years and it will take a male calf about 5 years to reach its full height and weight. Follow the link to the Bison profile page.

Learn More ([/refuge/national\\_bison\\_range/wildlife\\_and\\_habitat/bison.html](#))

## White Bison



White bison really do exist. It is just a form of albinism, which can occur in any living thing, plant or animal. Famous during his time, Big Medicine was born on and lived at the Bison Range from 1933 to 1959. A partial albino, he had a brown top-knot of hair and blue eyes. Today with such a large number of bison living in private ranches, it is not unusual to have white bison born now and then. The easiest way to see one may be at the National Buffalo Museum (<http://www.buffalomuseum.com/>) in Jamestown, North Dakota where three white bison are part of their herd.

[Learn More \(/uploadedFiles/BigMedicine.pdf\)](#)

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