

American Bison

Bison bison

The American bison is a large mammal, reaching over six feet tall, 10 feet long and weighing more than 2,000 pounds. The American bison has a massive head, front shoulders and a large hump on its back which gives it a distinct appearance. It carries a long, brown shaggy coat that is heavier and darker in the winter than in the summer. The male (bull) is larger than the female (cow), and both sexes have short, curved horns that are used for dominance establishment within the herd and for defense. American bison are herbivores, meaning they eat only plant life.

The mating season for the American bison occurs in August and September, with the cows giving birth to calves during the spring. Typically, one calf is born per cow, and the calf is light brown in color. The color of the calf's fur darkens after about three months, and the calf nurses for about one year. American bison mature after three years and have an average life expectancy of about 15 years in the wild.

The American bison is an aggressive animal that is surprisingly agile. It has been known to attack humans and can run up to 35 miles per hour. The only real predators of the American bison in the wild, besides humans, are wolves and bears, but both species will typically prey on the calves versus the much stronger and larger adult animals.

The American bison was once widespread across the plains states, including Illinois. Market hunting and the settlement of humans across the United States were the main factors for the decrease of bison numbers. Their cape (hide) was valuable in parts of the United States and Europe, and the meat was used by settlers for food. The American bison was extirpated from Illinois around 1830.



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