

Rewilding Europe discusses the reintroduction of European Bison in Romania's Southern Carpathian mountains

A hugely successful European bison reintroduction program in Romania's Southern Carpathian mountains is helping turn the tide for this iconic species.

NIJMEGEN, GELDERLAND, THE NETHERLANDS, July 18, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- A historic milestone

The majestic American bison (or "buffalo") once roamed North America in vast numbers until it was hunted to the edge of extinction in the nineteenth century. But did you know that it has a European cousin?



A male European bison in the Southern Carpathian mountains.

The European bison, which closely resembles its American counterpart, once ranged across Europe - from France in the west to the Caucasus Mountains in the east. And just like the

٢

To reach 200 bison is a historic milestone. If the population continues to increase at a similar rate, we estimate that it will number between 350 and 450 animals by 2030."

Marina Drugă, Executive Director of Rewilding Romania American bison, it was once on the verge of disappearing forever. By 1927, hunting and habitat loss meant there were only 54 European bison left alive, all in captivity.

A record-breaking rewilding initiative in Romania's Southern Carpathian mountains, which kicked off in 2014, is now helping turn the tide for the European bison. Today, more than 200 animals roam free within the 1200 squaremile "rewilding landscape" here, boosted by the arrival of at least six new calves in 2024.

"To reach 200 bison is a historic milestone," says Marina

Drugă, Executive Director of <u>Rewilding</u> <u>Romania</u>, the organization overseeing the initiative, together with WWF-Romania and a range of other partners. "Of the total bison population in the Southern Carpathians, more than half have now been born in the wild. If the population continues to increase at a similar rate, we estimate that it will number between 350 and 450 animals by 2030."

Record-breaking expansion

Between 2014 and 2023, nearly 100 European bison were released in Romania's Southern Carpathians, sourced from zoos and breeding centres across Europe. Before the reintroduction program began, bison had been absent from the landscape for at least 250 years. Two additional herds totaling 14 animals were released in 2024, to further boost genetic diversity.

As it grows, the bison population in the Southern Carpathians is recolonizing the landscape more quickly than any other reintroduced bison population in Europe, with an estimated current range of more than 140 square miles.



A female European bison and calf in the Southern Carpathian mountains.



A herd of free-roaming European bison in the Southern Carpathian mountains.

To ensure the animals can disperse safely, Rewilding Romania recently signed partnership agreements with two national parks. Some bison, which are tracked using GPS collars, have been seen to reach elevations of nearly 7000 feet, which is also a record for the species.

Bison are nature and climate heroes

European bison - just like the American bison - have the potential to be both biodiversity and climate heroes. Through their grazing, foraging, trampling and fertilizing, they help to maintain nature-rich landscapes of forest, scrub, and grassland - such as those found in the Southern Carpathians - as well as myriad smaller habitats, which host diverse plant and animal species.

These same interactions can boost the capture of atmospheric carbon in both vegetation and the soil, with carbon also stored in the bodies of the bison themselves. The positive climate impact of European bison was underlined in a recent modeling study by the Yale School of the Environment. Researchers calculated that the bison currently roaming free in the Southern Carpathians could help grasslands in the area to capture roughly 10 times as much carbon as they did before bison were reintroduced.

Positive community impact

Rewilding prioritizes people as well as nature. The comeback of European bison in the Southern Carpathians is driving the development of a local nature-based economy, enabling people to benefit from increased income and jobs. By raising the profile of the area, and attracting more visitors, bison recovery is also enhancing the pride local people have in the area's natural and cultural heritage.

The Rewilding Romania team are working hard to engage local communities - to understand their needs, raise awareness of rewilding, and ensure that the recovery of nature delivers benefits to as many people as possible. Complemented by measures such as ranger patrols, this helps to promote human-wildlife coexistence.

A conservation success story

The comeback of European bison in the Southern Carpathians is framed by a more extensive recovery of the species across Europe. Thanks to wide-ranging conservation efforts, the overall European bison population has increased from just over 2500 to around 9000 individuals over the last decade alone. Considering how few European bison existed a century ago, this represents a remarkable conservation success story, offering a beacon of hope for the restoration of biodiversity on a global scale.

Rewilding Romania is affiliated with <u>Rewilding Europe</u>, an international initiative operating at the frontline of European rewilding. While definitions of rewilding vary slightly, this progressive approach to conservation is essentially about trusting nature take care of itself, enabling restored natural processes to repair degraded ecosystems. From the Ukrainian Danube Delta in the east to the Greater Côa Valley in Portugal in the west, Rewilding Europe is currently rewilding ten large landscapes across Europe, with the aim of expanding this to 15 by 2030.

The free-roaming bison population in Rewilding Europe's Rhodope Mountains rewilding landscape in Bulgaria is also growing, managed by the Rewilding Rhodopes foundation. In 2024, European bison were translocated to Portugal for the first time, thanks to the efforts of the Rewilding Portugal foundation and partners.

Bison in North America

Europe is not the only continent to embrace bison rewilding as a way of revitalizing ecosystems. In North America, Yellowstone National Park has joined with the Fort Peck Tribes in Montana and the InterTribal Buffalo Council to reintroduce American bison to tribal lands.

There are two subspecies of American bison - plains bison and wood bison. Today, there are roughly 31,000 wild bison in North America, comprising 20,000 plains bison and 11,000 wood bison. The best place to see wild American bison is Yellowstone National Park, with a free-roaming population of around 5000 animals. These are hybrids of plains and wood bison.

For a truly memorable encounter with the wild bison of the Southern Carpathians, <u>book a</u> <u>unique bison tracking experience</u>.

Laurien Holtjer Rewilding Europe +31 6 20589213 laurien.holtjer@rewildingeurope.com Visit us on social media: Facebook X LinkedIn Instagram YouTube

This press release can be viewed online at: https://www.einpresswire.com/article/728633673

EIN Presswire's priority is source transparency. We do not allow opaque clients, and our editors try to be careful about weeding out false and misleading content. As a user, if you see something we have missed, please do bring it to our attention. Your help is welcome. EIN Presswire, Everyone's Internet News Presswire[™], tries to define some of the boundaries that are reasonable in today's world. Please see our Editorial Guidelines for more information. © 1995-2024 Newsmatics Inc. All Right Reserved.