



FAST FACTS

Name: Bison (buffalo)

Scientific family name: *Bovidae*

Wood bison species name: *Bison athabascae*

Plains bison species name: *Bison bison*

Average weight: 725 kilograms

Life expectancy: 20-40 years

PHYSIOLOGY

Bison, also known as buffalo, are very large animals with a shaggy dark brown mane. They have humped shoulders and short legs that are covered with hair. They have a long tail with a furry end, called a tuft.

Their coat is extremely thick in order to keep them warm in cooler temperatures and in the summer months they shed to keep cool.

Short, black horns stick out from the bison's massive head, just above their eyes. These horns are used to defend themselves against predators. Bison's eyesight is poor, but their hearing and sense of smell is very good. In fact, a bison can smell an animal three kilometers away.

Male bison are called bulls and have large, square-shaped necks, while females have smaller, rounder necks and are referred to as bison cows.

HABITAT/BEHAVIOUR

Bison feed mainly on grass, plants and sometimes berries. Finding food in the winter isn't a problem for the bison. They swing their large heads from side to side and push the snow away in order to find grass.

Despite their size, bison are very fast creatures, able to run up to 55 kilometres per hour. They are also excellent swimmers, but are so buoyant that the head, hump and tail stay above the surface of the water.

Bison are mostly active at night time and at dusk.

RANGE

Bison used to roam in herds of thousands, but are now found in much smaller groups. In North America, bison are still hunted by grizzly bears, grey wolves, and cougars. In northern Canada, they roam freely in protected areas. Today, small herds are found in northeast British Columbia, northwest Saskatchewan and the Northwest Territories.