



Dear Readers, I encourage you to read the second issue of the European Bison Friends Society News, covering the period from the beginning of the year to July. Much of the information collected on our pages you could read earlier on the webpage news of EBSF - here they are just combined and condensed. But you also will find additional texts, prepared for our bulletin, such as an extensive interview with Prof. Kajetan Perzanowski.

Enjoy reading

Interview with prof. Kajetan Perzanowski from the Carpathian Wildlife Research Station Museum and Institute of Zoology, Polish Academy of Science in Ustrzyki Dolne, vice-president of the European Bison Friends Society.

ABOUT KINGS OF BIESZCZADY FORESTS AND POLONINY

How many European bison live now in the Bieszczady Mountains?

About 300. I say – about, as part of the European bison at this time may be on Ukrainian or Slovak side of the border, or animals from the neighboring herds may come to us. Thus, the number of European bison assigned to Bieszczady population changes throughout the year.



How accurately you can count them? Counting as far as I know takes place in winter?

The assessment of population numbers is based on year-round observations, but the main count takes place in winter, when European bison can be seen better in the field. We can roughly say, how numerous are individual herds, but we have to remember that their size is quite dynamic, changing constantly, which is typical for this species. So we verify our data often in the second half of winter, usually in places where animals are fed, where they come and aggregate. This allows us to possibly correct the results of year-long observation. .

Do European bison roam completely freely, or are their movements, in some way, are "channeled", governed by the people?

They walk quite freely but of course, if they are using the feeding points, then they are likely to periodically come to such places. In Bieszczady there are no fences, barriers, etc., so they are not constrained in this respect. They themselves choose the place that more or less they prefer - for various reasons. Perhaps there are more: tasty food, water, or simply there is less disturbance. European bison concentrate in other places in the winter, than in the summer. Areas where they like to stay where they concentrate more likely are their refuges - but the "designated" by the animals themselves, not by humans.

Growing from year to year the number European of bison testifies to their good condition?

They have adapted perfectly to Bieszczady conditions and cope well. They are fed mainly due to two reasons: first, our European bison live in the area, where there is normal forestry and game management carried out by State Forests, which also includes the establishment of feeding points for animals, of which of course make use also European bison. Secondly - especially near the Ukrainian border - feeding allows to keep animals at our side of the border. If we had ever ceased feeding, European bison would disperse within Bieszczady forests and lived very well on. Feeding is more useful ... to us - at the border, and it also allows for more accurate monitoring of the European bison, for example, their counting.

For many years the European bison have been monitored - their way of living, movements, health. Are those studies still carried on, and whether in connection with results of these observations, are some changes, adjustments to the environment being introduced, to ensure better living conditions for the animals?

We monitor European bison continuously since 1998. We investigate their habitat preferences such as forest type, altitude, slope inclination etc. Such information are primarily needed for the determination of environment quality for European bison in new places of introductions. We conclude that in the Bieszczady there is no need to add new species of trees attractive to European bison, as forests cover here approximately 85% of the region, and is composed mostly of natural stands, mainly Carpathian beech forest, where grows everything what animals may possibly need. In some places, on former farmland additionally some pine and spruce were planted - these are conditions suiting the animals very well, and there is no need to change the composition of tree stands to fulfill needs of this species.

Apparently European bison in Bieszczady are wilder than, for example in Białowieża?

It's true. These animals are much more wild. It is extremely difficult to approach them, usually when trying one can only hear the fleeing herd. Occasionally, from a distance of several tens of meters one can take a look at them when they are gathered at the feeding points, but it is not easy. Even for our employees.

But you are successful?

Well, maybe more than the tourists ...

Every now and then come the news of tuberculosis emerging among the European bison in Bieszczady. As at this moment, what is the situation?

The TB problem is that this disease exists now, in the past and in the future - bacillus persists in the environment for years and we will never really be able to get rid of it. Its bearers are not only the European bison, but also other species: badger, deer. As for the European bison, only 5 cases were recorded in last three years. We are not yet sure of the current source of infection, but it must be noted that not every animal that comes into contact with tuberculosis must become ill. Like the man, who may encounter tuberculosis everywhere, e.g. in a tram, but not necessarily he will become ill. We are very vigilant and carefully observe our European bison, so we can react quickly and eliminate an ill individual.

You are coordinating European bison restitution program in the Carpathians, in cooperation with Ukraine, Slovakia and Romania. At what stage is it now?

The program is being implemented since the late 90s of the 20th century. At the moment we are in the stage of re-establishment of herds of European bison in Ukraine. Even in the 80s, there were more European bison than in Bieszczady Mountains, but they became extinct due to poaching. In Romania, where there are several closed-breeding centers, there are preparations for the release animals into the wild, near the border with Ukraine. An acclimatization enclosure has been built there. A herd on the Slovak side is doing well, we hope to increase this population. First animals are already in Hungary and the Czech Republic. We would like the total number of Carpathian population to reach at least 500 individuals in the next few years, - it is a "safe" number, which guarantees their demographic and genetic stability. Bieszczady herd has already almost reached the desired size - to the limit determined by the capacity of the environment, but in other countries increase of the number of European bison is possible and we hope that this will happen in Slovakia and Ukraine, resulting in creation of a common Carpathian population. This eco-region has exceptionally favorable conditions for this.



Are the authorities of these countries interested in the project? How is the cooperation?

Unfortunately, I must say that the project is implemented properly only through direct contacts with people very involved, interested European bison, enthusiasts, because there is no interest from the - let's call it - neighboring countries, from their offices and official bodies. There are more obstacles to overcome than assistance. But yes, when in 1998 we started this program we did not think that it will develop so well. It is truly growing and still reaching a wider scale.

And for you, sir, as a naturalist, what is the most interesting in the European bison?

This is the last representative of large grazing mammals, which primarily feed on grasses, herbaceous plants, and forest undergrowth. Our all other species of large herbivores - deer, moose - belong to browsers, they eat mainly browse i.e. twigs and leaves of trees and shrubs. Besides the European bison, to the group of grazers belonged also the aurochs and wild horses, but now they are gone, they extinct long time ago. They are sometimes efforts to substitute the wild horses with, e.g. Polish koniks, but it is possible only on a very small scale. But the European bison remained in few places and especially this aspect of his presence in the environment is very interesting to me. The opportunity to introduce him as the missing component of the nature.

Professor, do you like to make "ambush" on the European bison, or less colloquially speaking - to observe them, to be involved directly in monitoring?

Well, that is the essence and taste of the work of naturalist. Watching European bison in their natural environment is always a great experience, a huge herd is impressive especially while they run downhill from the mountain slope when you feel like an earthquake, or while running through the river, making water fountains up to several meters. But even the observation of a single individual or a cow with the calf is a unique event, it is hard to believe that such a huge, weighing several hundred kilograms animal is able to move so quietly.

Do you spend much time in the field, or rather, in the office, developing materials, contacting the "bisonologists" etc.?

Unfortunately, I regret to confess that this pleasure meets me less and less frequently, as the bureaucracy associated with the efforts for fundraising for research, reporting, preparing presentations, manuscripts for publication takes more and more time. Fortunately, I have very committed and professional colleagues, who at the time of fieldwork also collect an extensive photographic documentation, which allows me occasionally to feel the atmosphere of the forest under Chryszczata or of vast meadows of Tworylne.

Thank you for the conversation



EVENTS

- January** In all the places where European bison live in free-roaming herds animals were counted. At the first this year's "Around the European bison" meeting , Dr. Jan Śmiełowski talked about the crucial role of the Poznan Zoo in European bison restitution in the 20s last century.
- March** The EBFS organized the first of a series of workshops conducted under the project "Protection of European bison in situ in Poland" in Gołuchów. The addresses of the workshops are primarily foresters, representatives of agencies and local governments from areas where free-roaming herds of European bison are present, also students showed great interest in the subject.
- The second "Around the European bison" meeting - speaker was a member of the EBFS, Łukasz Poławski, who specializes in European bison transport and arranges transfers of our animals. He talked about the objectives of European bison transportation, often over long distances, and conditions to be satisfied that the animals withstand such journeys unscathed.
- April** „Around the European bison" meeting: Prof. Wanda Olech shared with the audience impressions from her recent trip to Spain in the Cantabrian Mountains region. The inhabitants of this region are interested in the introduction of European bison into their environment. The small herd, already existing there, that came from Poland, is a great attraction.
- The commission with Wanda Olech made an inspection of two private enclosures for European bison: in Strzelinek - in the Valley of Charlotte and in Bałtów, checking whether the European bison which will live there have appropriate conditions necessary for this species. Everything turned out to be fine and the same month first animals were placed in the new enclosures.
- May** European Bison Friends Society presents its achievements during the Days of WULS - in a special promotional tent
- June** In Zlocieniec the workshop under the project "Protection of European bison in situ in Poland - Westpommeranian voivodeship" took place. It gathered a large group of people interested in conservation and development of the European bison population in the region.
- July** The third workshop on the protection of European bison in situ, in the southern part of Poland, took place in the Bieszczady Mts, in Muczne. Participants found it very successful.
- Also:** The ninth international conference on the protection of bison, organized by the EBFS is being prepared . This year's conference entitled "Bison, Forests, Lakes" will be held on 22-23 September in Borecka Forest. 130 specialists from Belarus, Czech Rep, Netherlands, Spain, Denmark, Germany, Russia, Ukraine, and of course Poland have signed up to participate. For the first time we will host a guest from overseas - from the United States.
- European bison traveled: from January to July between Polish breeding centers.

UPCOMING PLANS OF THE SOCIETY

European Bison Day, in Lutowiska, where we will set our promotional tent;
organization of subsequent workshops for a wide range of people interested in conservation of European bison in situ in Poland;
organization of the IX conference on the protection of European bison and General Assembly of Members of the EBFS to be held during the conference at Borecka Forest.

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