

Name _____



Date _____

American Bison

Related to domestic cattle, American bison (or American buffalo) seem to feel cold only in the front part of their bodies. Indeed, American bison have long, saggy, coarse, brown hair covering just their front halves. Hence, looking from afar, American bison appear half-naked. Yet, a closer inspection quickly reveals that American bison do have brown-colored hair -- albeit very short -- covering their lower backs and hind legs.



Aside from this unusual dress code, American bison have short horns that point upward and broad heads that they cannot raise higher than their prominent, humped shoulders. Measuring around 6.5 feet tall at their shoulders and weighing up to 2,200 pounds, American bison are undoubtedly the largest terrestrial animals in North America! Despite their massive size, American bison can run at a top speed of 40 miles per hour!

Feeding on grasses, American bison can be found in the Great Plains and the Rocky Mountains. The Great Plains stretches from Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba of Canada to Texas of the United States. In addition to the Lone Star State, the Great Plains also covers several other states in the U.S., including North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, and New Mexico. The Rocky Mountains, sandwiched between the Great Plains on the east and the Great Basin on the west, extend from central Mexico, through the United States, to Canada and Alaska. The series of mountain ranges are about 2,000 miles in length.

Depending on where American bison live, they are divided into two groups -- the plains bison and the wood (or woodland) bison. As the names imply, the plains bison take up residences in the Great Plains, whereas the wood bison seek establishment in the Rocky Mountains.

Except during the breeding season from July to September, adult male American bison (or bulls) don't usually socialize with mature female American bison (or cows) and their young (or calves.) Hence, we often find bulls forming one group, and cows and calves forming the other. Nevertheless, as the mating season draws closer, a bull no longer considers other bulls of the same bachelor group his comrades. Instead, he regards them as his competitors. Therefore, he is willing to fight with any bull that dares to express interest to a cow that he himself wants to mate with. When he wants to ward off his rivals, he bellows so loudly that the sound is audible 3 miles away. If his roar cannot discourage other bulls, he lowers his head and wrestles with contending bulls head-to-head.

Once numbered around 50 million, American bison had a close call of becoming extinct in the late 19th century due to unrestricted hunting. William F. Cody (1846-1917), nicknamed "Buffalo Bill", was the most famous of all hunters. He alone slaughtered more than 4,000 American bison in less than two years and supplied the meat to feed railroad construction workers. When commercial hunting of American bison grew out of control, the population of American bison dwindled. It was estimated that there were merely 835 American bison in the United States by 1889! Then, thanks to William T. Hornaday (1854-1937), a pioneer of wildlife conservation, the remaining American bison were placed under protection. Today, there are about 200,000 American bison residing in parks and reserves. Although American bison have enjoyed a healthy comeback since that bleak year of 1889, they still need all the help they can get from us or they may lose their prestigious title of North America's largest land animal to the moose!

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Questions

- _____ 1. What is the largest land animal in North America?
 - A. American buffalo
 - B. Moose
 - C. Walrus
 - D. Polar bear

- _____ 2. Which of the following about American bison is correct?
 - A. They measure about 6.5 feet at the tip of their horns.
 - B. They live in the Great Basin and the Rocky Mountains.
 - C. Male American bison roar during the mating season. Their bellow can be heard 3 miles away!
 - D. They weigh up to 2,200 kilograms.

- _____ 3. American bison have long, saggy hair covering their whole bodies.
 - A. True
 - B. False

- _____ 4. Depending on where they live, American bison can be divided into two groups -- the plains bison and the woodland bison.
 - A. False
 - B. True

- _____ 5. In which of the following states can we most likely find American bison?
 - A. California
 - B. New Hampshire
 - C. Nebraska
 - D. Arizona

- _____ 6. Which of the following statements about Buffalo Bill is NOT true?
 - A. He is credited with saving the American bison from extinction.
 - B. His real name is William F. Cody.
 - C. He is the most famous American bison hunter.
 - D. He killed American bison and supplied the meat to railroad construction crews.

- _____ 7. A mature male American bison often engages in fighting with another mature male American bison during the breeding season.
 - A. True
 - B. False

- _____ 8. Who helped to end the commercial hunting of American bison?
 - A. William Cody
 - B. William Shakespeare
 - C. William Tell
 - D. William Hornaday

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_____ 9. Which of the following statements about American bison is INCORRECT?

- A. American bison have broad heads that they cannot raise higher than their humped shoulders.
- B. American bison are completely hairless on their lower backs and hind legs.
- C. American bison are related to domestic cattle.
- D. American bison can run as fast as 40 miles per hour.

_____ 10. Which of the following about American bison is true?

- A. Male and female American bison usually live in large groups together.
- B. Today, there are about 835 American bison living in the wild unprotected.
- C. William F. Cody killed more than 4,000 American bison in less than 2 months.
- D. Once numbered around 50,000,000, American bison were hunted to near extinction by the late 19th century.