

Name _____

The Life Cycle of a Bison



A bison's life begins when a female bison, called a cow, gives birth to a baby bison, called a calf. Calves are born in the spring after a gestation period of about nine months. When a calf is born, it has a reddish-brown coat and can stand and walk within a few hours. This helps the calf stay close to its mother for protection from predators.

During the first few months of life, the calf relies on its mother's milk for nourishment. By the time the calf is a few weeks old, it begins to graze on grass, though it continues to nurse from its mother for several months. Calves stay with their mothers for about a year, during which they learn important survival skills.

As the calf grows, it becomes a yearling. Yearlings continue to grow and gain strength but are not yet fully mature. At this stage, bison stay in large herds for safety and social bonding. Male yearlings, called bulls, may begin to separate from the main herd as they get older.

By the age of 2 to 3 years, bison reach adulthood. Male bison, or bulls, become larger and stronger than females and often live alone or in smaller bachelor groups. Female bison, or cows, stay with the herd and can begin having calves around this age.

Bison can live up to 20 years in the wild. Throughout their lives, they help shape their ecosystems by grazing and creating open spaces for plants and other wildlife. Their life cycle continues as adult bison reproduce and care for the next generation of calves.