

Name _____

Do Bison Form Relationships with Other Species?



Bison are large, powerful animals that live in grasslands and prairies. While they may seem solitary, bison actually interact with several species in their ecosystems. These relationships help both the bison and other species survive.

One important type of relationship bison have is mutualism. Mutualism is when two species help each other. For example, birds called

cowbirds often follow bison as they graze. As bison move through the grass, they stir up insects that the cowbirds eat. In return, the cowbirds help keep the bison free of pests by eating ticks and other small insects from their fur.

Another type of relationship is commensalism. In commensalism, one species benefits while the other is not harmed or helped. Prairie dogs often share habitats with bison. The bison's grazing keeps the grass short, making it easier for prairie dogs to spot predators. However, the bison are not affected by the prairie dogs' presence.

Bison also have parasitic relationships, which are less helpful. Parasites like ticks feed on bison's blood, which can make the bison uncomfortable or even sick. The ticks benefit, but the bison are harmed in this relationship.

Despite the occasional parasitic relationship, bison play a crucial role in their ecosystems. Their grazing patterns help shape the landscape and support plant growth. This helps other herbivores find food and creates habitats for birds and insects.

Bison show us how species in an ecosystem can be connected. Their relationships with other animals and the land are essential for a balanced environment.