

European bison released into wild Carpathian range

May 18 2014, by Georgeta Petrovici



European bison are released at a reserve in Armenis village, south-western Romania on May 17, 2014

Seventeen European bison were released in Romania on Saturday into the wild Carpathian mountain range, one of the largest reintroductions of the endangered mammal in Europe.

The animals which came from Sweden, Germany, Switzerland and Italy,

were blessed by a local Orthodox priest in the southwestern village of Armenis, in the Tarcu mountains of the Southern Carpathians.

The event marked the return of Europe's largest herbivore in the Tarcu mountains 200 years after the last animals disappeared due to poaching.

"This is a very important day because usually we are used to losing species but today we are gaining a species in this area," Magor Csibi of the environmental group WWF told AFP.

The bison will first live in a re-wilding zone to learn necessary survival skills and also to form a solid social herd structure, the WWF and the Rewilding Europe group said.

In early September, these cousins of the American bison will be left completely in the wild where they will coexist with deer, wolves and bears, they said.

The European bison has recovered to a population of more than 5,000 after going extinct in the wild in the 1900s. But only 3,400 of them live in free or semi-free herds.



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Decimated by hunters and the loss of their habitat, the European bison bounced back thanks to a large-scale breeding programme of the last survivors in captivity, whose offspring were reintroduced to the wild in areas of central and eastern Europe.

Poland now counts the largest population of bison in Europe with more than 1,300 animals, according to the Warsaw-based European Bison Conservation Center.

In the long run, Rewilding Europe and the WWF hope to see the herd of the Tarcu Mountains grow to 500 animals.

"Increasing the number of bison is important, not only for the survival of the species, but also for biodiversity reasons," they said.

In southeast France, the reintroduction of the bison has led to an increase in biodiversity.

At Haut-Thorenc, about an hour from the French Riviera, the number of plant species has risen from seven to 40 on the terrain where [bison](#) are grazing.



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But in Romania, the second-poorest country in the European Union after Bulgaria, the reintroduction is also meant to boost the economy.

A visitor centre and rangers jobs will be created in this remote mountainous area where many young people are leaving in search of jobs.

"I was unemployed and now I am a ranger which means a steady job to sustain my family. This project has a positive impact on our community as a whole", Ilie Hurduzeu, a 32 year-old father of two, told AFP.

He and his colleagues will be in charge of alerting the authorities in case of poaching.

But the head of the forest administration in the county, Stefan Stanescu, was optimistic: "I am sure that even poachers will be proud to see these endangered animals here and that they will protect them".

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