

# 100 years ago

European bison were extinct in the wild, but they are now returning to Dutch nature

Wisents, or European bison, once roamed wild throughout large parts of Europe. We know from fossil remains found in the North Sea and just across the Belgian and German borders that wisents were probably also native to the Netherlands. However, except for a few animals remaining in captivity, European bison went completely extinct in the wild. Fortunately, a breeding programme initiated in Poland in 1929 managed to save Europe's largest land

mammal. Thanks to conservation efforts, reintroduction projects and breeding centres, bison population is now growing and spreading. In December 2015 there were 6,000 bison in Europe: 4,400 in the wild or living in semi-wild conditions and 1,600 in captivity. Nevertheless, European bison is still a vulnerable species and more work needs to be done to ensure that this impressive animal is no longer at risk.



# European bison in the Netherlands





# Unique in the Netherlands

The wisent, also known as the European bison, is the largest living land mammal in Europe. Captive breeding and reintroduction programmes have saved European bison from extinction, but it is still a vulnerable species. Also the Netherlands is pushing bison conservation, several Dutch organisations are helping the species conservation, and nowadays around 70 bison can be found in Dutch nature. This brochure explains where you can see these awe-inspiring animals.



## European bison in Kraansvlak

**Landscape:** Kraansvlak is composed by 330 hectares of coastal sand dunes of different ages with several natural dune lakes. The landscape ranges from open dune grasslands to dense coniferous and deciduous forests.

**Project:** Since the arrival of European bison in 2007 at Zuid-Kennemerland National Park, the herd grows naturally without any supplementary feeding. This has given scientists the perfect frame to study bison ecology under natural conditions.

**What you can see and do:** A herd of more than 20 wisents • Lookout point near the main watering site • Bison trail – with chance to catch sight of the animals roaming the dunes while walking through the park • Excursions with a ranger.

[www.wisent.nl](http://www.wisent.nl)

## Lelystad Nature Park

**Landscape:** Lelystad Nature Park covers 400 hectares and provides large areas of habitat for several critically endangered species. The wisents here roam 40 hectares, which they share with Przewalski's horses. You might also spot Père David's deer, otters, storks, and elks.

**Project:** The European bison breeding programme releases a herd of wisents in other areas of Europe every two years.

**What you can see and do:** Wisent trail • Excellent hiking and cycling trails • Visitor centre (with bike hire) • Field trips • Electric car and silent boat excursions for groups • On-site restaurant • The park is open from sunrise to sunset daily and admission is free.

[www.flevo-landschap.nl/natuurpark](http://www.flevo-landschap.nl/natuurpark)

## Rules for visitors

Keep at least 50 meters distance from the animals.

Never walk through the herd.

Stay on the trail. If there are bison on the path, turn back!

Dogs are not allowed.

Do not feed the animals.

Stay away from the calves. Females are protective of their young.

## European bison in the Veluwe

**Landscape:** The Kootwijk forestry area at the heart of the Veluwe region is one of the oldest areas managed by Staatsbosbeheer (the government agency that manages natural heritage in the Netherlands). The area contains forest, heathland, the largest natural sand drift in Western Europe and the area where bison live. Together with naturally occurring red deer and wild boar, the wisent make this diverse landscape even more appealing.

**Project:** 2016 saw the arrival of a small herd of wisents in the Veluwe. The herd's 400 hectares terrain is off-limits to the public. European bison enrich the landscape and nature. Additionally this helps to preserve the species. Guided tours are the only way of seeing these awe-inspiring animals in the Veluwe.

**What you can see and do:** Hiking and cycling excursions.

[www.wisentopdeveluwe.nl](http://www.wisentopdeveluwe.nl)

## European bison in the Maashorst

**Landscape:** At the Maashorst nature reserve trees, plants and animals run the show just like they used to. Pick your way among trees, brooks and wildlife. Spot bison, tauros and Exmoor ponies. Experience the impressive geological phenomenon 'de wijst', which is unique to this area. Discover archaeological sites and ancient treasures. Follow your instincts and see where they lead you!

**Project:** A small herd of European bison lives in a 170 hectares enclosure. Researchers study how bison interact with walkers (with dogs on a leash), cyclists, riders and horse drivers. The long-term aim is to allow the bison to roam free in an area of 1500 hectares that includes footpaths, cycling trails and horse trails.

**What you can see and do:** Hiking excursions can be booked through [www.natuurcentrumdemaashorst.nl](http://www.natuurcentrumdemaashorst.nl). Occasionally, there are open-days organized for public to visit the area.

[www.bezoekdemaashorst.nl](http://www.bezoekdemaashorst.nl)

