

Buffalo Trace Education Box

Lesson 3

Life Cycle of a Bison

Purpose: Students will sequence statements about the life cycle of a bison from birth, growth, adolescent, adult and decline. Students will learn how bison calves are precocial and compare with other animals that are altricial.

Subject Areas: Life Science (life cycle and adaptations of bison), Language Arts (Sequencing)

Materials Needed: life cycle statements (provided), pencil and images of a bison calf from the book Bison (Our Wild World Series) by Cherie Winner or from another resource.

Steps:

1. Introduce students to the terms precocial (pree-ko-shal) and altricial (al-trih-shal).
2. Share with students the meanings.
 - Animals that are born **precocial** are independent at birth. Bison calves are born with their eyes open. (The gestation period for the baby bison is 9.5 months.) The calves are mobile by walking, standing and, almost immediately, running.
 - Animals that are born **altricial** are helpless, such as bears and squirrels. That means they require care from the parents for awhile because they may be born blind and have a low birth weight.
3. Provide students a copy of the life cycle sentences. Students will number the sentences (1-10) starting with the birth of a calf. (The first one has been numbered.)

Extensions:

- Scholastic.com has ten ideas for using Life Cycle lessons in the classroom, from diagrams (“Focus on a Cycle”), booklets and mobiles.
- Research bison enemies which lead to the end of a bison’s life cycle: human, wolf, grizzly bear, coyote, cougars and changes in the seasons (ice, mud, tornadoes, fire, lightning).

Resources:

- Images of the bison life cycle can be found at “American Bison” from the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve (Kansas), nps.gov
- National Geographic has animal videos, including life cycles.

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KEY
Life Cycle of a Bison

Number the ten statements (1-10) from birth to adulthood.
The first one is done for you.

1 In the spring from late March to May, the calves are born, weighing 25-40 pounds, with reddish brown or orange fur. Their eyes are open.

2 Within a few minutes of birth, the calves are standing and walking.

3 Within a few hours of birth, the calves are running.

4 For the first six months, calves nurse from their mother, but they can also graze on grass at only six days old.

5 After six months old, male calves become completely independent of their mother. Female calves usually become independent a few months later.

6 Young bison, as adolescents, may remain with their mother's herd or they may find another herd.

7 At two years old, a female bison becomes mature. A male bison becomes mature at five years old.

8 During the breeding season (called the rut), a male bison will "tend" a chosen female bison by staying near her and fighting any other male bison that challenges him.

9 Adult female bison can produce one calf each year for 15-20 years.

10 Adult bison can live for 12-15 years in the wild. In captivity, they can live to be almost 30 years old.

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Name _____ Date _____

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- _____ Young bison, as adolescents, may remain with their mother's herd or they may find another herd.
- _____ For the first six months, calves nurse from their mother, but they can also graze on grass at only six days old.
- _____ Within a few minutes of birth, the calves are standing and walking.
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- _____ At two years old, a female bison becomes mature. A male bison becomes mature at five years old.
- _____ Within a few hours of birth, the calves are running.
- _____ During the breeding season (called the rut), a male bison will "tend" a chosen female bison by staying near her and fighting any other male bison that challenges him.
- _____ Adult bison can live for 12-15 years in the wild. In captivity, they can live to be almost 30 years old.
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