



# The Browser

## Bison after eight centuries back to Latvia

European cooperation goes beyond the scope of economics. In Latvia, European bison is introduced as a partnership between different European players. It is a perfect example of the role of the Large Herbivore Foundation; facilitating initiatives that contribute to ecological restoration in Europe. More initiatives will soon follow. Joep van de Vlasakker reports on the Latvia case.

On 5 December 2003 a truck with four European bison from Nature Park Lelystad, The Netherlands on board left for Latvia. In the bison reserve Damerow, Northern Germany,

another bull was loaded. After a long journey, by boat from Rostock, the bison arrived safely at the harbour of Liepaja on 8 December.

Four animals, one bull (Camille) and three cows (Berta, Kitty and Janneke) were purchased at a reduced rate from the Dutch Foundation Flevolandschap, and the German bull (Dalo) was kindly donated for free by the Damerow reserve. All animals were so called 'surplus animals' as the areas they lived in exceeded the carrying capacity. The animals would have been killed before winter,

resulting in a loss of genes and animals from an already very small world population of European bison of around 3.000 animals.

### Conservation partnership

After months of preparation and many veterinary bureaucracy the work finally paid off, when the five bison were released from the truck to the enclosure in Latvia. Within the enclosure the bison will live with groups of kiangs, marrals and Hungarian grey cattle. Here they will be temporary stationed to recover from the journey and acclimatise to the local conditions.

The Large Herbivore Foundation supported this project that was initiated by World Wide Fund for Nature Latvia and Flaxfield Nature Consultancy to reintroduce bison to Latvia at Pape Nature Park. This park is located in southwest Latvia close to the Lithuanian border. Lake Pape is a lagoon with a great variety of ecosystems in its direct vicinity, and thus a rich biodiversity. The management of Lake Pape is aiming to restore the natural ecosystem, including all ecological processes like grazing by a natural community of large herbivores. In 1999 a group of konik horses was re-

leased in a 250 hectares enclosure. As a result of the grazing, a dynamic mosaic landscape is starting to develop that benefits many plant and animal species. The grazing area is visited by many people and has developed already as the second most visited site in the region. Several local people earn a living from the direct income generated through the presence of the large herbivores.

### Future perspective

Next target is to get enough funds to build a large grazing area of 200 hectares of meadows and forest at the northern border of Lake Pape. The land belongs to the local municipality of Nica and has been kindly offered for the reintroduction of European bison. The area will be, under guidance from a ranger, be open for the public, which can get accustomed to the presence of European bison and its ecological role through this 'show' enclosure. The bison are planned to be released in Lake Pape Nature Park in the spring of 2004. In a later stage of the project it is planned to release the bison fully to the wild either at Pape Nature Park or another suitable area in Latvia.



Bison release to the temporary enclosure near Lake Pape ©

### CONNECTION

## European bison as binding element

As a consequence of becoming an independent foundation, the LHF is, more active than ever, searching for interesting partners. Partners in terms of conservation, communication and fundraising. While exploring new opportunities for large herbivore conservation, an interesting partner emerged.

It all started with seven lonesome bison living in a recreation forest near Amsterdam. Intrigued by their presence within a stone's throw from the Dutch capitol, the LHF contacted the owner of the animals, Amsterdam Zoo 'Artis'. From that moment on, November 2003, it turned out that the LHF

and Artis had a lot in common when it comes to herbivore conservation, in particular the conservation of European bison. The story with bison and Artis started in 1862 when the first European bison were transported to Artis. During that period, the world population of free ranging European bison was still decreasing. At the beginning of the twentieth century numbers had gone down to 12 animals.

### Establishment pedigree book

This alarming situation led to the initiative by former Artis director Armand L.J. Sunier to start a captive breeding programme for European bison.

Actually, his interest in the species even led to one of the first pedigree books in the world. In 1985 the European Endangered Species Programme (EEP) was founded. This programme is a cooperation between various European zoos, like Artis, aiming at the re-introduction of endangered species in their natural habitat. And that is how the zoo and the LHF were linked to each other. The first meetings between Artis and the LHF showed great potential to cooperate on European bison conservation. The period of exploring possibilities has been left behind. It now comes to concrete actions in the field. We will keep you informed.



Statue of Armand L.J. Sunier at Artis Zoo © Marc Argeloo

### EDITORIAL

### COMMUNICATION

## Mountain ungulates and wild boar

LHF-representative in Spain Juan Herrero was closely involved in the organisation of the 'Third world conference on mountain ungulates'. Recently a selection of papers presented at this conference was published. Another recent publication from Juan's hand involves wild boar in Spain.

Mountain Ungulates Research 2002 is published as a special issue of 'Pirineos, A Journal on Mountain Ecology'. It holds 18 articles and three short communications on various topics such as morphology, ecology and behaviour, management and conservation, and ecology and diseases. Interesting papers are published on trophy hunting in

Mongolia and Pakistan involving different species of wild Caprinae. The book is published in English and can be ordered at

Another publication by Juan's hand deals with wild boar in Aragon, Spain. Truly a thorough study of the species in an interesting region of Spain, from the high Pyrenean mountains in the north of Aragon, to the depression of the Ebro river and the Spanish meseta. It's thoroughness is also illustrated by the 236 references made in the literature list. The book is published in Spanish (no English translations or summaries). It costs and can be ordered at

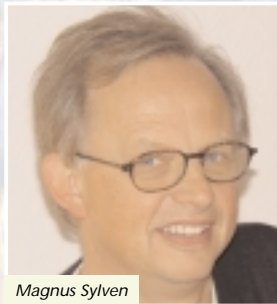




THE OTHER SIDE [Full Name: Large Herbivore Foundation] [Birth Place: Zeist, The Netherlands] [Birth Date: spring 2004]

## Introduction of the board by the board

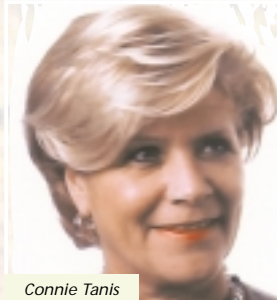
Now the initiative has changed into a foundation a new organisational element has been introduced: the board. The Large Herbivore Foundation feels confident, but also honoured that the new board consists of persons with a proven and impressive track record in various disciplines. From nature conservation to financial management, and anything in between. It is time to let the board members speak for themselves. An introduction.



Magnus Sylven



Waltraut Zimmermann



Connie Tanis



Sabijn Timmers

**The Browser:** Magnus Sylven and Waltraut Zimmermann, being the ecologists in the board, tell us about your first encounters with large herbivores in Eurasia.

Magnus Sylven: "During my ecology study, I became interested in herbivores through a fascinating book by Michael J. Crawley, *Herbivory - The Dynamics of Animal-Plant*

Interactions. It provided an account of the ecological significance of herbivores in the widest sense - from leaf-chewing and seed-feeding insects to sheep, horses, goats and deer. Next to this theoretical introduction, I feel privileged, originating from southern Sweden and currently living in south-western Switzerland, to enjoy the view of large herbivores. Roe deer, red deer and chamois in Switzerland

and moose in Sweden. These encounters always fill me with excitement."

Waltraut Zimmermann: "I see large herbivores almost every day, as I am working in a zoo. I am especially engaged in Przewalski's horses, Asiatic wild asses, Bukhara deer and saiga, with remarkable breeding successes, especially in the delicate saiga. Next, I am involved in the reintroduction of Przewalski's horses in the Gobi in Mongolia and, together with 'wild cattle', the Hortobágy National Park in Hungary."

**The Browser:** Sabijn Timmers and Connie Tanis, you both cover an entirely different field, being an actuary and management consultant respectively. The LHF recently took you to the herbivore rich Oostvaardersplassen in The Netherlands. Tell us about your experiences.

Sabijn Timmers: "I only saw wild animals on television or at the zoo. It was very impressive to see 'wild cattle', these big, majestic animals with their giant horns. The first thing you do is make sure you don't get in their way! But then, if you have time to realise what you are looking at, it is amazing. I just didn't know there was such a wonderful piece of nature in The Netherlands. It really opened my eyes."

Connie Tanis: "I was also deeply impressed. Even more so, because the area is situated almost in my backyard, less than 20 minutes drive from my home town. I have never been aware of that and it struck me by surprise. It was beautiful to see those huge animals grazing peacefully in free-living populations and let nature restore itself."

**The Browser:** What excites

you both becoming active for the sake of large herbivores?

Connie Tanis: "In my work it is my job to function as a catalyst to get more out of people and by doing so let organisations function in a better way. Most of the time I am trying to make people feel responsible for their own lives. The excursion to the Oostvaardersplassen made me realise that a lot of people are not aware of what is happening in the nature that surrounds them and I would like to contribute to that process of awareness."

Sabijn Timmers: "After my graduation last summer I had the intention to spend time on an issue more relevant for society. Of course a commercial company also has more stakeholders than only shareholders, and more goals than only making money, but nevertheless it seems not as meaningful as the work the LHF does. When they asked me to join the board because of my financial background I was very pleased to have this opportunity and didn't think twice."

Waltraut Zimmermann, two of your colleague board members have a commercial and management background. Their first encounter with large herbivores was an unforgettable moment. Do you, with your wildlife experience, still feel a similar thrill compared to these colleagues?

"I cannot imagine this thrill ever wanes when encountering large herbivores, especially in their natural habitat. When being in steppe regions either in Africa or in Eurasia I always have the feeling to enter a world from long ago. It is fascinating to watch these various mammal species displaying their behavioural repertoire in the wild. Zoos were able to preserve the wild horse and I always regretted

that I never could meet the ancestor of our cattle, the imposing aurochs. Therefore, one of my goals is also to perfect the reconstruction of the aurochs, which is continued for instance in the Hortobágy steppe in Hungary. On reaching this would be another unforgettable moment.

**The Browser:** Magnus Sylven, what opportunities do you see to establish partnerships that may contribute to large herbivore conservation?

"The LHF addresses the conservation of a large set of species, many of which are seen as 'charismatic' and appealing to the wider public. I am particularly thinking of species such as the European bison, the ibex, the only remaining wild horse - the Przewalski horse - and the world's largest sheep - the argali. Some of these are important as game animals and their conservation provides huge economic incentives for both rural communities and urban dwellers. For others, to simply experience these animals in the wild provides sufficient inspiration and joy for them to be willing to travel to remote places. Many companies in the corporate world obviously find some of these species - such as the bison - sufficiently appealing to choose them as symbols or logos. As such, I believe the LHF has an interesting potential to seek partnerships amongst traditionally non-conservation groups like hunters, local communities, travel and tourism agencies, and companies in a widest sense. The LHF can offer such parties interesting projects to be associated with, joint ventures on the ground, guided visits for employees by local experts, workshops, lectures etc."

### LIFE STOCK

## Where the wild meet the tame

LHF representative Leonid Baskin reports on the delicate balance between wild and tame reindeer in Siberia. Where the role of subsidies has a direct impact on how these two reindeer populations grow and dwindle.

Shcherbakov's community of Even indigenous people live near the Pezhenka River in Chukotka, Siberia. Seven men and their families, totalling 30 people, are roaming along the river basin. While two or three men are herding tame reindeer on forestless mountain tops, others are hunting moose, snow sheep, brown bear, or are fishing. Evens transport by reindeer sledge and meet at Bilibino, a town where a nuclear plant and gold mines are situated. It is another 300 km to the northeast.

In April suddenly the mountains have become full of wild reindeer. For three days large herds of wild reindeer move through the Pezhenka basin. As a consequence, domestic animals

get mixed up with the herd of wild animals. From 3200 tame reindeer only 292 remained.

**From state support to private support**

Carrying tame reindeer by wild herds has become an important problem in Chukotka. In the 1980s half a million tame reindeer lived in Chukotka. Only 8.000 wild reindeer existed in that area and they needed protection against native hunters and miners. Since 1991, the state stopped financial support of reindeer husbandry. As a consequence, reindeer managers and shepherds started to sale tame reindeer. In these days isolated shepherds lived exclusively on meet of tame animals. Pretty soon pastures were abandoned by domestic animals. An increase of wild reindeer populations soon followed (now there are about 130.000 wild reindeer), causing conflicts with the remaining tame reindeer populations.

Since 1999, a new governor of Chukotka, multi-millionaire

Roman Abramovich, started to pay managers and herdsman rewards for each conserved tamed reindeer (about 17 US\$). Actually, it is the same system of subsidies as in the former Soviet Union. For each ruble earned by a farm the state paid two more.

As a result, a new increase of reindeer husbandry in Chukotka was observed (now there are about 121.000 tame reindeer). And the competition with wild reindeer for pastures will be continued...



Household of an Even family near Chukotka © Leonid Baskin

### The Browser

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