

Dangerous Wild Animals (Northern Ireland) Order 2004

Guidance on the keeping of Bison or American Buffalo



**Environment &
Heritage Service**
www.ehsni.gov.uk

- 1. Species Name** *Bison bison* - American Buffalo or Bison
- 2. Additional information**

Bison and any hybrids crossed with bison require a licence under this legislation.

Farmed bison may also be subject to regulation by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD). Anyone requiring further information should contact their local DARD Divisional Veterinary Officer.
- 3. Housing overview**

Bison are normally housed in groups in an outdoor paddock with a secure shelter in which they may be temporarily housed.

Although they appear bulky and heavy, bison can move more quickly than most horses. Once running at full speed, bison can break through relatively heavy fencing. It is therefore important that fencing be strong and secure.
- 4. Keeping experience**

In order to protect the welfare of these animals and to protect keeper and public safety, keepers must be able to demonstrate a good knowledge of the husbandry and handling of bison.

There should normally be a second named person nominated and included on the licence who is competent to care for the animals should the owner be absent or incapacitated.

Housing Recommendations

5. Construction

Bison are large, solidly built animals, with the ability to push through normal cattle fencing if provoked. Any buildings or fencing used must be adequate to contain bison.

Bison may tend not to make use of built facilities such as shelters, however all enclosures should have an enclosed holding facility for the animals to permit the veterinary treatment of the animals if necessary.

Any concrete or artificial flooring used should be non-slip.

6. Fencing

Fencing for enclosures must be strong enough to withstand the weight of bison running against it. Fences must be made of material appropriate to the site; metal bar, high tensile wire, electric wire or other heavy-duty cattle fencing are appropriate.

Fences should be a minimum of 1.5 metres tall (5 ft.). Wooden fence posts should be a minimum of 15 cm (6 inches) in diameter, whereas steel posts should be at least 7 cm (2 7/8 inches) in diameter. If wire fencing is being used, fences should be made up of at least 6 strands of wire, 15 cm apart.

The fencing should be set into concrete foundations to increase stability. Corners should be braced. Gates should be of the same solid construction as the rest of the fence.

- 7. Size** Enclosures should be as large as possible. It is recommended that each bison be allowed a minimum of 1 acre of land. If the keeper intends to keep a herd, the bison enclosure should be of an adequate size for the number of animals.
- 8. Temperature and Shelter** Normal outdoor temperatures in Northern Ireland should be tolerable for bison, however adequate shade and protection from the elements should be provided. In hot weather, dominant animals may exclude lower ranking animals from the most desirable positions, so there should be sufficient shade provided in the enclosure for all.
- 9. Lighting** As bison should be kept outdoors, no special lighting is required. Additional lighting may be required inside holding facilities, to allow the keeper to clean and maintain the enclosure easily.
- 10. Ventilation** Any enclosed holding quarters should have some suitable form of ventilation.
- 11. Drainage** The drainage of the outdoor enclosures must be capable of rapidly removing all excess water. Drains should be designed to avoid injury to the animals. Any open drains, other than those carrying surface water, should be outside the enclosure. Any faecal material must be disposed of in an environmentally sound manner.
- 12. Cleanliness** Enclosures should be maintained in a clean state, with faeces, food debris and litter being removed on a regular basis. Indoor hard flooring should be hosed down and disinfected regularly.

- 13. Social dynamics and behavioural considerations** Bison are herd animals, and are best kept in a group.
- 14. Prevention of escape** It is recommended that keepers do not enter the enclosure with the animals. If this is necessary, then slow movement and careful progress are important so as not to startle the animals, which could cause them to stampede. Ideally a separate holding yard should be used to contain the animals whilst the enclosure is being cleaned or maintained. The use of a separate holding yard will also remove the possibility of animals escaping through the gate when a keeper enters the enclosure.

If an outdoor enclosure is accessible by the public, for example, adjoining a public highway, steps should be taken to prevent the possibility of the public gaining access to, or being injured by, the animals. This may require the erection of a secondary fence (a stand-off barrier). Clear signs warning of the danger should be erected.

- 15. Food, drink and bedding** Bison are ruminants and spend a large percentage of their day grazing. Adequate pasture supplemented with hay, and mineral blocks are appropriate. The buds, young leaves and acorns of oak trees are poisonous to bison, and the animals should not have access to them.

Fresh drinking water should be provided at all times.

Bedding material for these animals is not required.

- 16. Visiting interval** The animals must be monitored at appropriate intervals, normally at least once every 24 hours.
- 17. Exercise and enrichment** There should be adequate space to allow the animals to exercise.

This species enjoys swimming and rolling in mud wallows and, if possible, there should be the opportunity to express this behaviour within the enclosure.

18. Provision for capture and transportation

Some method of enclosing the animals into a holding pen should be incorporated into the enclosure, to allow the administration of veterinary treatment. The door mechanisms for these holding pens should be operable from outside the enclosure.

If large groups are kept, a race and squeeze chute are necessary to safely catch and treat bison. It is important to get the bison accustomed to using the chute, and travelling through the race. An enclosed squeeze chute will result in bison being calmer during treatment. The chute and race should be at least 2 metres (7 feet) tall, workable from the outside, and sturdy.

Veterinary treatment should be provided on-site. A tranquilliser weapon system should be readily available for emergencies.

A licence, issued by the Department of the Environment, for the keeping of these animals may specify restrictions on the movement of these animals and procedures to be followed.

19. Emergency planning

There should be a written contingency plan in place to be used in the event of an emergency, for example fire, flood, animal escape or injury to the keeper.

20. Notification Requirements

A licence, issued by the Department of the Environment, for the keeping of these animals may specify procedures to be followed in the event of an escape and on the provision of information to the Emergency Services (e.g. the Fire Service) on the dangerous wild animals being kept.

You are required to notify the Department of the Environment of any intentions to breed the animals.

21. Prevention and control of spread of infectious disease

Some provision should be made to allow the separation of sick or injured animals if a group is kept.

The keeper should provide details of their veterinary arrangements with a practice prepared to treat these animals. A schedule of veterinary care, including vaccination and routine parasite control is required, and the keeping of records of veterinary attention is essential. These animals are susceptible to diseases of domestic cattle.

There are no transmissible diseases carried by these animals that pose a risk to the general public provided that the animals have been tested free from tuberculosis and brucellosis and the public do not come into direct contact with the animals, or their by-products.

Explanatory Notes

These notes have been produced to provide people wishing to keep dangerous wild animals with guidance on the requirements they may have to meet. In determining whether or not a licence should be issued, the Department of the Environment will consider the information provided by the applicant when applying for a licence. The Department will also arrange for a suitably qualified person to carry out an inspection of the premises at which the animal or animals will be kept and the inspector's report will also be taken into consideration. It is at the Department's discretion to waive certain recommendations, or add additional ones, to the guidance provided in this document. There is a right to appeal within 21 days if a licence is refused or if the applicant contests conditions applied to a licence.

Contact Information

For further information on the Dangerous Wild Animals (Northern Ireland) Order 2004, contact the Department of the Environment, Environment & Heritage Service, Biodiversity Unit on 028 9056 9605

For CITES enquiries:

Wildlife Licensing and Registration
Service
Global Wildlife Division
**Department for Environment,
Food and Rural Affairs**
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Tel 0117 372 8691

For rabies quarantine enquiries:

Quarantine Section
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Food and Rural Affairs**
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