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Results of Breeding European Bison in Polish Zoological Gardens During the Postwar Period (1945–1965)

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Authors discuss the role of Polish zoological gardens in breeding European bisons and distributing them all over the World. During the postwar period 13 bisons were born in zoos and 43 animals were sent abroad to 9 countries.

The restitution of European bison in Poland after World War I and their complete extinction in the Białowieża Primaeval Forest is connected to a great extent with the activities of zoological gardens. As early as 1924 the Poznań Zoo purchased a pair of European bison and sent them to Białowieża after keeping in exposition for some years in the Zoo, while the next European bison, 1 male and 2 female purchased in 1929 by the Warsaw Zoo, formed the start of the interwar breeding of European bison at Białowieża. When World War II broke out only the Warsaw Zoo had a pure-bred male European bison, and apart from this specimen there was a small number of hybrids of European and American bison in the Zoological Gardens in Warsaw, Poznań and Cracow.

In May 1945 out of the total number of approximately 40 pure-bred European bison in Poland, only the Wrocław Zoo possessed any specimens (2 males, 1 female), while the other four zoological gardens existing at that time in Cracow, Łódź, Poznań and Zamość had no European bison.

Towards the end of 1965 there were 10 zoological gardens active in Poland — 6 larger and 4 smaller ones, the latter being of only local importance and character. In the six large zoos, in Gdańsk, Cracow, Łódź, Poznań, Warsaw and Wrocław the total number of European bison was at that time 13 (8 males, 5 females), not including a few hybrids in the Zoo at Płock. There were no European bison in the zoological gardens in Katowice and Płock, which had exhibited these animals earlier on in the postwar period, or in the small zoos at Zamość and Opole.

A total of 50 European bison were exhibited in Polish zoological gardens during the postwar period. During this time 13 of these animals were born in zoos, 4 (2 males and 2 females) in Gdańsk Zoo, 1 (a female) in Łódź, 5 (4 males, 1 female) in Warsaw and 3 (2 males and 1 female) in Wrocław. The best breeding conditions for European bison, i.e. runs of not less than 0,2 to 0,5 ha are those currently available in the zoolo-

gical gardens in Gdańsk, Cracow, Łódź, Płock and Warsaw; there are only breeding pairs of European bison in the Gdańsk and Warsaw Zoos.

The poor results obtained from breeding European bison in zoological gardens in Poland which were obtained during the twenty-year postwar period are due to the fact that the animals shown in collection of these zoos were mainly either single males or animals of both sexes which had been withdrawn from breeding in the bison reserve on account of age or for other reasons. European bison born in zoos are given names beginning with the identification syllable »ZO«.

Exhibition of European bison in zoological gardens is desirable from the aspect of general breeding policy, as the animals may form a certain stock in case of accidental losses in natural reserves, and also as visual propaganda for protection of the European bison as a species. In addition it facilitates studies, experiments and scientific observations of all kinds.

An important task of zoological gardens in Poland in relation to protection of the European bison is to co-operate in the formation of new breeding centres abroad by sending European bison to other zoos. During the period from 1945—1965 under the barter arrangement for exchange of animals with other zoological gardens 43 individuals (23 males, 20 females) of pure-bred European bison were sent abroad (and two hybrids of European-American bison, one of which was sent to the Zoo in Pekin). Of this number 11 were sent to the Soviet Union, 9 to Czechoslovakia, 9 to East Germany, 4 to Denmark, 3 to Austria, 3 to the Netherlands, 2 to Belgium, 1 to the Argentine and 1 to Hungary. The efforts made resulted in the establishment or restoration of former bison-breeding centres in foreign zoological gardens, including those in Copenhagen, Rotterdam, Antwerp, Prague, Gottwaldov, Leipzig, Halle, Rostock, Innsbrück and several other towns.

The exchanges made were of course also advantageous to the zoological gardens in Poland, as other valuable animals were received in exchange for European bison. There are good grounds for trusting that in the future also co-operation with nature protection authorities will continue harmoniously, with undoubted advantages to the movement for restitution of the European bison and its preservation as a species now freed from the threat of extinction.

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WYNIKI CHOWU ŻUBRÓW W POLSKICH OGRODACH ZOOLOGICZNYCH
W OKRESIE POWOJENNYM (1945—1965)

Autorzy zestawili dane dotyczące hodowli żubrów w polskich ogrodach zoologicznych. W kilku większych ogrodach (Gdańsk, Łódź, Warszawa, Wrocław) urodziło się po wojnie ogółem 13 żubrów. Pary rozplodowe znajdują się aktualnie tylko w Gdańsku i w Warszawie. Ogrody zoologiczne odegrały poważną rolę w restytucji gatunku *Bison bonasus*, m. in. poprzez rozprzestrzenianie go po świecie. Ogrody zoologiczne wyeksportowały łącznie 43 żubry do 9 krajów Europy i Ameryki.