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40 years of the European bison breeding in the Forest Culture Center in Gołuchów

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Abstract: The paper presents chosen information about last 40 year of activity in the field of European bison conservation. The Forest Culture Center as special organization has many goals connected with history and culture especially in forestry. The European bison play great role in education process, which also is important activity of the Center.

Key words: Education, Museum of Forestry, European bison

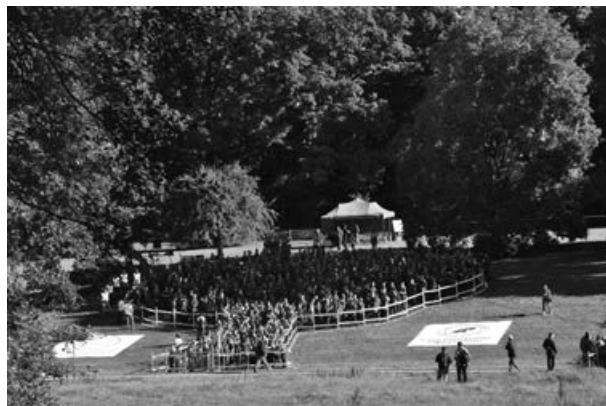


In this year the Forest Culture Center in Gołuchów celebrates 40th anniversary of the opening of European bison breeding enclosure. Therefore on this occasion we are pleased to welcome the participants of scientific Conference The European bison in the Culture and in the Art.

The aim of establishing the Forest Culture Center was the organization of the Museum of Forestry. Nowadays our statute goals include:

- the activity connected with protecting the heritage of Polish forestry by running the Museum of Forestry, keeping and protecting historical castle-park complex and the park-arboretum revalorization;
- the management of information resources including historical knowledge on organization and functioning of State Forests, techniques and technology used in forestry, forest culture;
- continuous education of society for environmental and forest related issues;
- supporting the artistic activity of foresters and artists whose works are inspired by the forest and forestry;
- cooperation and exchanging of experiences with universities and schools, national parks, associations and social organizations, arboretums and botanical gardens, and museums;
- managing the European bison breeding enclosure and the Model Animal Pen.





The Museum of Forestry which is managed by the Center, is the only one of such kind in Poland, where all aspects of connections between people and the forest are presented. Presented exhibits, document multigenerational heritage of foresters, environmental value of Polish forests, an art inspired by the forest, and development of forest technology. The exhibitions are presented in the historical buildings of Czartoryski residence.

The park-arboretum is one of the oldest and the largest gardens in Poland, founded in the second half of the XIXth century. It covers 158 hectares and includes 3 km stretch of Ciemna River Valley. Because of a number of old specimens growing there, the park in Gołuchów is called “the live museum of old trees”, some of them belong to the oldest and the most beautiful in Poland.

The European bison breeding enclosure is located in the forest complex, adjoining the park-arboretum. Its present area is 20 hectares including forest stands and hay meadows. It is divided into few zones, one of them is so called “day zone” with a platform where from tourists and participants of educational classes are able to observe the European bison.

First European bison arrived to Gołuchów in spring of 1977. In total, 15 European bison have been brought from other centers during 40 years of the existence of enclosure. As much as 97 calves were born in that time. A majority of them, was





provided for further breeding to other centers and zoos in the country and abroad. Nowadays 10 European bison live in the enclosure.

In the enclosure which is managed by the Forest Culture Center in Gołuchów, in order to provide proper conditions and fulfil the breeding requirements, the herd remains under constant care including regular preparation and supplying of the feed; providing veterinary care; maintenance of feeding facilities, fencing and infrastructure in proper condition; as well as continuous monitoring of the enclosure and tourist traffic. All activities which are connected with maintenance of the enclosure and care over European bison are accomplished by trained and experienced staff including professional veterinarian. Therefore, our European bison are in good physical and health condition.

The Center takes part in the project: “*Ex-situ* conservation of European bison *Bison bonasus* in Poland” which includes following goals:

- maintenance of the European bison herd, preparation of the feed and feeding of animals, control regarding the proper condition of animals’ feed and cleanness of drinking water, fulfillment of veterinary recommendations, maintenance of order and cleanness,
- purchase of forage and preparation of hay for European bison;
- the modernization of the enclosure including: rebuilding of the fence and installation of gates, allowing for functional connection of the new quarantine enclosure, of 0,5 hectares, to catching area and other parts of the European bison breeding enclosure;
- the continuous veterinary care over the herd is performed by an experienced veterinarian, whose recommendations are followed by the staff of the Center.

Under the framework of this project assembled were large-sized informational boards which include information about biology of European bison, the history of



species restitution in Poland and in the world, information about existing breeding places and enclosures in Poland and in the world, world-wide distribution of European bison, systems of protecting the European bison and projects which are useful in education and information. For improving living conditions for, in this year we plan to increase the size of the enclosure by adding few hectares of forest.

Tourists have been very interested in visiting European bison enclosure since the beginning of functioning of this place. In 1997 we brought there the fallow deer, and in 2004 wild boars and Polish koniks. Thus we referred to the tradition of situating breeding and show enclosures for wild animals in parks neighboring with aristocratic residences. An account of visitors indicate an increase of their interest and currently their numbers are estimated for over 100 thousand per year.

On the basis of museum exhibitions, the area of the park and the Model Animal Pen, organized are museum lessons, field classes, lectures, and workshops. Their scenaria are adapted to different forms and methods of teaching like: chats, observations, questions and answers, plays and games, discussions, and include topics such as “Forest species of the Polish Red Book”, “Forest mammals”, “Interesting facts on European bison” and many others. The classes in the Model Animal Farm include observation of European bison, Polish koniks, wild boars, fallow deer. The participants obtain work cards with tasks to solve them, which concern body composition, habits, biology and the value of those species in nature. For many years the Forest Culture Center organizes contests for the name of newborn European bison. People are really enjoy taking part in that contest. Propositions for such names are sent not only from our neighborhood but also for example from the Polish embassy in Japan.

For 40 years of European bison breeding in Gołuchów, the Forest Culture Center as an organizational unit of Państwowe Gospodarstwo Leśne Lasy Państwowe (The State Forests National Forest Holding) became the important institution in the restitution process and conservation of endangered species.

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