

European Bison Exhibition Enclosure in Pszczyna

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“(...) Huge biodiversity is necessary for the existence of life. Billions of different organisms must use all the resources and opportunities, and for millions of species to coexist and support each other to keep the planet functioning. The greater the biodiversity, the safer is life on Earth, including ours. (...)”

Sir David Attenborough

“Life on our planet. My Story, Your Future”, 2021

Abstract: The European Bison Exhibition Enclosure in the Pszczyna Historical Park, which is part of the regional network for environmental and nature education in the Silesian Voivodeship, began its educational activities on June 1, 2008. In addition to the necessary breeding infrastructure, there is also an education and exhibition building on the site, where workshops and nature lessons are held. The exhibition complements the educational trail, which is systematically enriched with boards covering ecological topics as well as floristic and faunistic topics of the Pszczyna region. The European Bison Exhibition Enclosure aims to improve ecological awareness and knowledge about nature, especially among children and young people. The primary task of the facility is to use the example of the European bison to present the idea of nature conservation both in the context of everyday life and respect for nature resulting from the principles of sustainable development, and to sensitize visitors to the importance of biodiversity for every inhabitant of our planet.

Keywords: Pszczyna, education, European bison, nature protection, education

The natural wealth of the Pszczyna Land and the hunting culture of the successive families of the Pszczyna princes prompted the Pszczyna Commune and the Agency for the Development and Promotion of the Pszczyna Land to undertake joint activities in the late 1990s aimed at establishing a European bison exhibition enclosure in the Pszczyna Park, partly the so-called



Wild Promenade. The work begun in 1999 to obtain the relevant permits and design and planning documentation enabled construction work to begin in June 2007 on one of Pszczyna's most frequently visited tourist attractions. EU funds from the European Regional Development Fund were made available for this purpose as part of the Integrated Regional Development Program (measure: 1.4 Development of tourism and culture). The grant amounted to PLN 4,192,011.61 (69.5%). The total gross investment costs amounted to almost PLN 6,660,000. The municipality of Pszczyna made its own contribution (30.5%). On June 1, 2008, the European bison exhibition enclosure in the Regional Network for Ecological and Natural Education of the Silesian Voivodeship was officially opened.

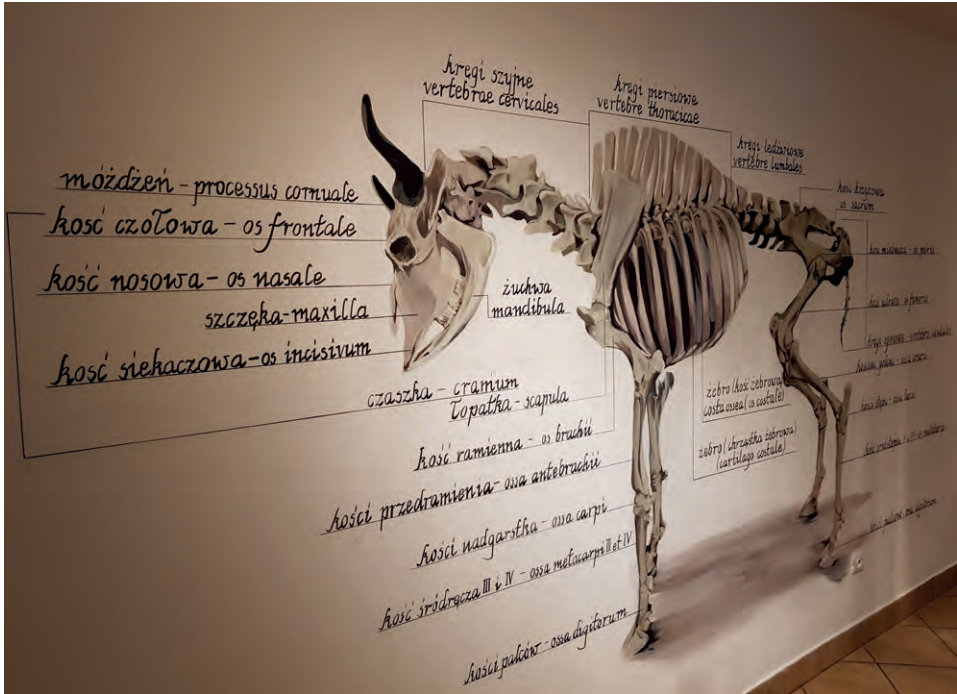
A system of paddocks with the necessary infrastructure (feeders, quarantine enclosures, feed storage and garages) was built under the park's old trees on an area of almost ten hectares. There is an educational and exhibition building on the site where workshops and nature lessons are held. The exhibition complements the curriculum, which is based on an educational trail systematically enriched with panels presenting both ecological themes and the flora and fauna of our country. An undoubted advantage of the ecological education center is the spacious viewing platform (as well as the exhibition



and education building adapted for the disabled), which allows direct observation of the European bison. The system of enclosures and the nearby paths also make it possible to observe other inhabitants of the enclosure such as fallow deer, red deer, roe deer, pheasants and, with a bit of luck, a red fox. An attraction and a kind of surprise for visitors are the peacocks, which walk slowly among the tourists, and the rabbits, goats, sheep and donkeys, which bring a smile to the faces of the youngest visitors. In the area of the European Bison Exhibition Enclosure, there is also a pond for water and marsh birds, which is very eagerly used by mallards and kingfishers, who lie in wait on the hanging branches of the trees or the fence of the enclosures near the pond in search of a meal in the form of small fish and also herons. A real treat for ornithology fans is the arrival of a black stork or a night heron, or you can watch white-tailed eagles flying by.

The European Bison Exhibition Enclosure aims to constantly improve ecological awareness and knowledge about nature, especially among children and young people. The primary task of the facility is to use the example of the European bison to present the idea of nature conservation both in the context of everyday life (reduction of consumption, humane treatment of animals) and respect for nature resulting from the principles of sustainable development,





and to make visitors aware of how important the biodiversity mentioned by Sir David Attenborough (Attenborough 2021) is for every inhabitant of our planet (both for us humans and for nature). The facility not only deals with the biological aspect of environmental protection, but also works holistically by carrying out outdoor activities (nature lessons, workshops “In the footsteps of the European bison”).

An additional attraction that expands the educational offer of the European Bison Exhibition Enclosure, is the nature trail, which opened in 2021. It consists of two routes leading through the picturesque areas of the western part of the Pszczyna Historic Park-Wild Promenade. The trail starts right behind the entrance gate to the park, and along its route there are information boards every few hundred meters describing, among other things, the ecosystem of the Pszczynka river, forest, meadow or pond. You can choose between two circular trails: the green one, called “In the footsteps of the European bison”, which is almost 4 km long, and the black “Cyranka”, which is just over 7 km long.

Since 2008, the European Bison Exhibition Enclosure has been a member of the European Bison Friends Society (a non-profit organization), whose headquarter is located at the Warsaw University of Life Sciences. The members of the Society carry out teaching, educational, publishing and documen-



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tation activities, participate in the European bison conservation program and cooperate with breeding centers on an international level. The academic teaching staff provides appropriate training and contributes to the creation of a new model of knowledge about the European bison in constant consultation with the teaching methodologists.

The European bison exhibition enclosure in the Pszczyna Historical Park has been awarded numerous prizes and nominations, including

- in the 10th edition of the competition of the Marshal of the Silesian Voivodeship “The best public space in the Silesian Voivodeship” – recognition for creating a place with a unique atmosphere that gives visitors the joy of contact with nature, for the best project in Silesia that contributes to the sustainable development of the country and the region;
- as part of the nationwide competition organized by the Polish Green Network Association together with the Gaja Club for the best projects using European funds;
- third place on the podium in the ranking “Quality of services provided by tourist information offices” located in the ticket office building of the European Bison Park. The ranking was carried out by the Meritum Marketing Scientific Club and the Tourism Scientific Club of the University of Economics in Katowice;
- a statuette of the European bison and the title “Friend of the European bison” 2015, for the contribution to the breeding of the European bison (*Bison bonasus*) of the historical subline (PL) of the lowland subspecies;
- Winner of the competition for the best ecological education center in the province
- as part of the prestigious “Eko Edu” competition organized by the Voivodeship Fund for Environmental Protection and Water Management in Katowice;
- ex aequo winner in the Silesian stage of the competition for the best tourist product;
- Nomination for the “Sunflowers 2021” award as part of a vote organized by the CzasDzieci.pl portal in the category “Nature-according to the development of natural intelligence”, due to the most developmental initiative for children aged 0-14 years;
- in 2022 – obtaining the highest rating by the Tourist Information Center operating in the European Bison Exhibition Enclosure – four stars, as a result of the analysis of the National Certification Commission of the Polish Tourism Organization, certification applications submitted by representatives of tourist information centers, examined and recommended by the Regional Certification Commission.



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The main task of the European Bison Exhibition Enclosure is to present the European bison and other animals found in the Pszczyna Forests to tourists. The center is part of the Forest Fund's program "Complex protection of European bison by the State Forests", the main goal of which is to ensure the existence of a stable and developing population of the species, including by supporting the creation of new breeding centers in the country and in Europe. As part of this project, two cows, PLISTA II and PLECIUGA II, went to Valencia, Spain, in December 2018 and two bulls in November 2020: PLATYN and PLENER II, who will join the newly established breeding farm at the foot of Andalusia's Sierra Morena. In 2024, the cow PLUSMENIA and the bull PLEBAN III from the Pszczyna-Jankowice "Żubrowisko" reserve were brought to the European bison exhibition enclosure to refresh the bloodline.

Over the years, a number of exhibitions have been organized, including on the occasion of the 155th anniversary of the arrival of the European bison in Silesia, works of art by children and young people participating in educational activities, as well as an exhibition in honor of Princess Daisy Hochberg of Pless Daisy-Natura (Inie). After the period of restrictions related to Covid19, visitors were offered a new version of the Gallery of Nature Photography by Mieczysław Hławiczka and a new exhibition in the so-called "House of the Gamekeeper", whose script places a special emphasis on recording the forest traditions of the Pszczyna region with their rich symbolic meaning through the coexistence of the connection of culture and nature in their material and immaterial meaning.

As part of cooperation with the Voivodship Fund for Environmental Protection and Water Management in Katowice, the educational offer for the youngest is systematically expanded, which allows children and young people to actively participate in activities, develop a multidimensional view of the world around them and support the development of fine motor skills (we take an example from the Montessori method, the Waldorf School or Richard Louv). In order to increase biodiversity in our immediate surroundings, several dozen nesting boxes and shelters have been installed on the site, which are inhabited by tits, starlings, wood pigeons, nuthatches and bats, flycatchers, robins, warblers and a number of other interesting species of native avifauna. On the site of the European Bison Exhibition Enclosure in the Pszczyna Historical Park, a mini-botanical garden will be systematically created and implemented in stages. The idea of the mini-botanical garden will allow our educational center to participate in the ex-situ conservation program and create a plant collection. In this way, it will have a positive impact on increasing the biodiversity of living organisms from different ecosystems and ecological complexes. The above activities are aimed at



enriching the educational offer and increasing the attractiveness of the place in tourist and scientific terms for students of natural science faculties and scientific employees of leading scientific centers in the country, so that it is possible to conduct courses and lectures in the European Bison Exhibition Enclosure in the Pszczyna Historical Park to expand knowledge in the professional fields of specific industries – thus we want to meet the expectations of our recipients. The latest didactic exhibit is a European bison skeleton with a dermoplast. The presentation of the exhibits is combined with the

display of copies of graphics showing the skeleton of a European bison and an aurochs from the work “De uro nostrate eiusque sceleto commentatio” by Louis Henry Bojanus from 1825, which is part of a larger study “Nova Acta Physico-Medica Academiae Cesareae Leopoldino-Carolinae Naturae Curiosorum”. This study is of great importance for wisent specialists and naturalists, as Louis Henry Bojanus proves through comparative analysis that the European bison (*Bison bonasus*) and the aurochs (*Bos primigenius*) are two different species.

We believe that through a comprehensive approach to biodiversity, centered on the European bison, we can increasingly involve numerous groups of visitors and participants of school classes of different age groups in ecological and natural history education, including the sustainable development of our immediate environment in which we live, linked to a close relationship with ecological biodiversity.

As an educational center, the European Bison Exhibition Enclosure has created a platform for the exchange of knowledge with a number of institutions in recent years, including: Department of Animal Genetics and Conservation, Warsaw University of Life Sciences, State Academy of Applied Sciences in Krosno, Polish Society of Tourism and Sightseeing, Editorial Office of the European Bison Pedigree Book, Kobiór Forest District, Media Family Publishing House, National Geographic Society, Polish School of Dendrology and Arboriculture, Center for Natural Heritage in Upper Silesia in Katowice and the Mammal Research Institute of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Białowieża, as well as museums and the State Archives. The area of the European bison exhibition enclosure is also used for promotional projects of sponsors and guardians of the European bison, such as Bank Pekao S.A. and Instalbud Sp. z o.o. from Pszczyna.

Since the beginning of the existence of the European Bison Exhibition Enclosure, every year a collection of acorns and chestnuts is organized for schools, kindergartens and private individuals, which serve as food for the animals living in the enclosure. There is also a tradition of organizing a competition to choose a name with the first letters PL for newborn European bison of the Pszczyna line.

Conducting educational activities in a place such as the European Bison Exhibition Enclosure in the Pszczyna Historical Park increases the attractiveness of the educational offer and facilitates the acquisition of acquired knowledge. The content of the ecological education program can be carried out in any order, so it can be adapted to the abilities of a given age group. The program is designed for preschool and early school education in grades I-III and IV-VI. The plan is also aimed at institutions that organize classes for

children with disabilities, groups that are otherwise marginalized or affected by social exclusion, as well as individual groups interested in a series of meetings. The educational activities are carried out in two ways, namely in direct, open contact with nature and inside the building using active forms of teaching (wooden puzzles, educational booklets, taxidermy exhibits).

In this way, the knowledge acquired in class is confirmed and consolidated. The lessons are prepared according to the age, interests and inclinations of the groups and are conducted by certified teachers and guides. The aim of the educational activities of the European Bison Exhibition Enclosure is to provide education in the areas of nature and environmental protection and to present topics from the fields of biology, ecology and biodiversity:

- Supporting activities to protect the European bison (*Bison bonasus*);
- Learning about protected animal and plant species and the diversity of ecosystems;
- Raising awareness of the beauty of the surrounding nature and the forms of unfavorable impact of human activities on it;
- Developing skills and interests (especially in the field of ecology);
- Presentation of the important role of the first European bison breeding enclosure in Pszczyna, the oldest breeding center in the world;
- Introducing the idea of nature conservation into everyday life;
- Respecting the principles of sustainable development and global biodiversity.

Pokazowa Zagroda Żubrów w Pszczynie

Streszczenie: Pokazowa Zagroda Żubrów w Zabytkowym Parku Pszczyńskim znajdująca się w sieci Regionalnej Edukacji Ekologiczno-Przyrodniczej województwa śląskiego rozpoczęła swoją działalność edukacyjną 1 czerwca 2008 roku. Na terenie zagrody, prócz niezbędnej infrastruktury hodowlanej, znajduje się budynek edukacyjno-ekspozycyjny, w którym prowadzone są warsztaty oraz lekcje przyrody. Ekspozycja stanowi uzupełnienie ścieżki edukacyjnej, systematycznie wzbogacanej tablicami przedstawiającymi zarówno zagadnienia ekologiczne, jak i obejmujące tematykę florystyczno-faunistyczną regionu pszczyńskiego. Pokazowa Zagroda Żubrów jest nastawiona na stałe podwyższanie stopnia świadomości ekologicznej oraz wiedzy przyrodniczej, zwłaszcza wśród dzieci i młodzieży. Nadrzędnym zadaniem placówki jest przybliżenie-na przykładzie żubrów, idei ochrony przyrody, zarówno w kontekście życia codziennego jak i poszanowania przyrody, wynikającego z zasad zrównoważonego rozwoju oraz uświadomienie zwiedzającym, jak ważna dla każdego mieszkańca naszej planety jest różnorodność biologiczna.
