**“Bison Babies Broadcast” Script – Part One**

Welcome to our first “Bison Babies Broadcast” sponsored by [Friends of Nachusa Grasslands](https://www.nachusagrasslands.org/), a non-profit organization founded in 2008 by volunteers dedicated to providing for the long-term care and management of The Nature Conservancy’s Nachusa Grasslands. We will be sharing some facts with you about the preserve’s [bison herd](https://www.nachusagrasslands.org/bison.html), focusing especially on our newborns.

Please note that this video includes a bison giving birth and that everyone who donates to Friends of Nachusa Grasslands during our “Bison Babies” campaign will receive a frameable photograph by volunteer Dee Hudson.

First, let’s talk about bison reproduction. Bison are sexually mature at two to three years, but bulls do not typically breed until they are about six years old. Males come into their rutting season in early summer, peaking in July and August. Female cows usually become pregnant at age 2, so they give birth for the first time at age 3. Fertility can continue until the cows are between 20 and 25 years old.

As bison have a 285-day (approximately 9½ month) gestation period, calves are usually born in mid-April to early June. A calving cow may remove herself from the herd or stay on the edge of the group during and after the birthing process. Most cows have a single calf weighing approximately 40 to 60 pounds, although twins can occur. Mothers typically do not experience any complications during labor. As soon as her baby arrives, the cow licks it all over until it stands and begins to nurse.

Calves are born with a rusty, orange coat, so are sometimes called “red dogs.” Their fur changes to dark brown in a few months. The earlier they are born, the better their chance of survival, and those born in earlier spring usually grow into larger and more dominant adults. Calves are able to move with the herd within just a few hours after birth. They run around and play hard . . . then power nap. Babies typically bound along behind their mothers, a favorite sight as they roam around Nachusa.

After a calf is born, the mother and baby may stay isolated from the herd for a couple of days. New mothers often form nursery bands, and mothers are fiercely protective of their young calves. As they graze and roam around the preserve, the calves usually stay close to their mothers. Babies nurse for about seven months and sometimes longer. At about two months, the calf will begin to develop shoulder humps and horns as their fur turns brown.

In the spring, yearlings are weaned from maternal care, and temporary yearling bands may form. By then, the females generally weigh around 350 pounds, and males weigh about 425 pounds.

The genders and parentage of each year’s calves are determined at the fall roundup, and all the animals are weighed and measured. Adult bulls can weigh as much as 1,800 to 2,000 pounds, stand 6 feet high at the shoulder, and be 11 feet long. Cows can grow to 900 to 1,200 pounds and are relatively smaller.

Every year, Friends of Nachusa Grasslands awards monetary grants to qualified candidates conducting scientific research significant to Nachusa Grasslands. [In 2020, Friends has distributed almost $48,000**,** divided in varying amounts among twelve researchers.](https://www.nachusagrasslands.org/science-grants-2020.html) Five of this year’s projects focus on our bison herd. Donations designated for our science program will enable Friends to continue funding similar studies.

To support the Friends of Nachusa Grasslands’ science program, click on the link in the video caption. You can donate [online](https://www.nachusagrasslands.org/2020-campaign.html) or [download a form](https://www.nachusagrasslands.org/uploads/5/8/4/6/58466593/friends_of_nachusa_grasslands_donation_form_2017.pdf) to mail in with your check. Contributions from new donors will be matched by a local foundation, and everyone who donates by the end of the fundraising campaign will receive a beautiful 5X7 photograph of Nachusa’s bison taken by volunteer photographer, Dee Hudson. In addition, new ongoing monthly donors will receive an 8X10 bison photo.

If you have any questions about bison calves, post them in the comments, and we will try to answer them. Our next broadcast will be about how you may be able see bison at Nachusa.