

Żubry nizinne i nizinno-kaukaskie w Puszczy Białowiejskiej

Lowland and lowland-Caucasian European bison in the Białowieża Forest

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SUMMARY

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The article confirms the documented date of the extinction of the last natural population of the lowland bison in the Białowieża Forest (i.e. 1919 yr). Restitution of the European bison in Białowieża has started in 1929. In its initial period, only the lowland-Caucasian line was bred in Białowieża. Attempts to reconstruct the pure lowland bison began as late as 1939 and resulted in the release of the first European bison into the wild in 1952. After World War II, the forest became divided into two parts, the western Polish part and the eastern Belarussian part, and therefore, the restoration of E. bison in both parts proceeded separately and has a different story. Recently there have been some suggestions that E. bison living in the Białowieża Forest in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century could have some admixture of the Caucasian bison's blood due to the relocation of a few Caucasian animals from the Caucasus to Białowieża. The article provides a reliable verification of those suggestions. At the turn of the century, two juvenile males of the Caucasian bison were brought to Białowieża Forest – one in 1899 and the other in 1907. They both did not take part in the reproduction and died at a young age (Table 1). The article provides also brief information on the results of comparative genetic studies conducted in the Polish and Belarussian populations in the Białowieża Forest. The Belarussian European bison population has genetic variants (alleles), which has never been observed in the Polish population of the lowland bison, but are present in the lowland-Caucasian line as well as in the extinct Caucasian bison. The authors believe that both genetic lines should be kept separately as the lowland-line bison are the last representatives of the subspecies *Bison bonasus bonasus*. Furthermore, the authors recommend to maintain the current division of bison into the lowland and lowland-Caucasian lines as presented in the European Bison Pedigree Book.