

Preface

We have linked up our whole adult lives with Poland's Białowieża Forest and its bison king. Following our graduation from the Faculty of Veterinary Science in Warsaw, 1961 saw us starting work at Białowieża. Małgorzata was at the Mammal Research Institute, Polish Academy of Sciences, while Zbigniew was with the Białowieża National Park. And that is how things have remained to this day.

The animal to which we have devoted this sizeable chunk of our lives is a truly fascinating one: huge, mysterious, unbowed and saved from extinction by some miracle. For many years, we have sought to gain a better understanding of its habits, biology and links with the environment. And the tracing of this primordial beast's efforts to survive in and (re)adapt to environmental conditions has been a source of enormous satisfaction for us.



The monograph's authors—Małgorzata Krasinśka and Zbigniew Krasinśki—in the Hybrids Reserve in 1975. *Photo* from the authors' archive.

While the European bison is emerging victorious from all this, for now at least, there are dangers on all sides. So one of the leading goals of our activity has been to keep ourselves fully acquainted with the threats in question, and to make sure that action continues to be taken to protect the species. Our work centres on the Białowieża Forest, taking in the whole area cut across by the state border between Poland and Belarus. However, we have also studied the other populations of European bison present in the north-east of Poland. The result of all our work comprises some 200 publications on the subject of European bison.

We should also mention studies devoted to the crossing/hybridisation of the species with domestic cattle. The animal created by way of these experiments was first known loosely as a hybrid, but later came to be termed the “*żubron*”. It was primarily to this issue that Małgorzata devoted herself over her first 15 years at Białowieża.

Our work has had its moments of danger, there being times when bison have decided to treat us to a swift dose of their horns or hoofs—but they always did this in defence of their independence.

Our greatest wish will have been fulfilled if the publication we offer here helps ensure that the relict animal it deals with will still be there in future for our descendants to see and enjoy, in the tiny scrap of wild nature we have left for it to inhabit.



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European Bison

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