

NOTA DE PRENSA

Researchers from 25 scientific institutions strongly advise against the introduction of European bison in Spain

- In an article published in the scientific journal *Conservation Science and Practice*, researchers from nine countries and several disciplines reflect on plans to introduce the European bison in Spain and warn that the European bison is not capable of restoring lost habitats in Spain nor contributing to slowing down climate change.



Bisonte europeo (Bison bonasus). // Universidad Complutense de Madrid

Sevilla, 10 de diciembre de 2024. Forty researchers from 25 universities and research centres from nine countries and several disciplines have conducted the first scientific analysis of introducing the European bison in Spain. In their article, published in the journal *Conservation Science and Practice*, they advise against incorporating the European bison into the Iberian fauna and outline the limits that renaturalization projects should not exceed. The authors include researchers Ramón Soriguer, Miguel Delibes, Montserrat Vilà of the Doñana Biological Station - CSIC.

The plans to introduce European bison in Spain have been marketed as nature restoration projects (rewilding). However, in reality, they fail to achieve this goal. According to the promoters of these projects, the European bison would revive the extinct bison depicted in the Altamira cave paintings, help mitigate climate change and serve as 'natural brush cutters' to prevent forest fires. As the article explains, European bison incapable of restoring lost habitats in Spain or performing these roles better than existing native wild or domestic herbivores.

It is impossible for the European bison to replace the bison depicted in the Altamira cave paintings, known as the steppe bison, because this prehistoric species is entirely different, definitively extinct, and lived in a habitat known as the 'mammoth steppe,' which no longer exists today.

Moreover, there is no evidence that the European bison ever inhabited the Iberian Peninsula, meaning its introduction into the wild would be illegal. Native to Eastern Europe, it is unlikely that the species could survive in the hot, arid Mediterranean climate without human assistance, including the provision of food, water, and veterinary care. This dependency may explain the high mortality rates and frequent failures in past acclimatization attempts.

The authors emphasize that, for ecological, bioclimatic, legal, and ethical reasons, the introduction of the European bison in Spain exceeds the boundaries of reasonable reintroduction. Attempts to justify its introduction rely on unproven assumptions, exploiting its iconic status as a flagship species to support a proposal that lacks scientific evidence. Its social and media appeal has been leveraged, prioritizing emotional arguments over objective considerations to create an atmosphere favorable to its introduction. This effort seeks to present the project as both a recovery plan for extinct Iberian fauna and a rescue initiative for an endangered species.

This work appeals to groups concerned with nature conservation to recognize the illegality and mistake of introducing species into areas where they have never existed, or where they once lived under entirely different conditions, merely for the sake of the myths they represent.

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