

From: Roy Liedtke
Sent: Saturday, February 01, 2014 9:47 AM
To: Owen, Sue (CMG-Austin)

Sue, all politics asideyes, it is common that a bison herd have a "lead cow". This is usually an older cow and she is the leader of the herd. As with many undomesticated animals, the bulls are with the herd during breeding season and frequently spend the rest of the time alone in a bachelor herd. This may all vary with the size of the herd and the size of the pasture.

From: Donald Beard
Sent: Saturday, February 01, 2014 10:17 AM
To: Owen, Sue (CMG-Austin)

Hello Sue,

Hugh is correct about the females status in the herd. North American Bison are very much a matriarchal society. In fact, the males generally stay away from the main herd and will either be solo or in "bachelor" groups until the breeding season. Once the rut begins however, the large males return to the herd and fight each other for the right to breed. You will find males dominating the females during this time.

I would be happy to discuss this further with you next week if you wish.

From: Wallen, Rick
Sent: Monday, February 03, 2014 4:02 PM
To: Owen, Sue (CMG-Austin); Amy Bartlett

Sue: The answer to your question is ... it depends on the context of the situation. The larger groups are mixed gender with adult females being the primary leaders of those groups. Those groups will have males in them that are less than 4 (a few exceptions probably occur). During deep snow falls when the group needs to break a trail, you can some times observe 2 and 3 year old bison breaking trail for the group but they will take turns with the adult females. The older solitary bulls will also break out some of the trail network and you could say the cow calf groups simply follow those trails that are packed down by the older bulls. During the breeding season (July and August), some of the older bulls will join the cow calf groups to contribute their genes to the next generation. I would argue that the older cows tend to lead those groups around the landscape and not the older males.