



WILDLIFE

HOME ON THE RANGE

The designation of the North American bison as the national mammal of the US is recognition of the remarkable conservation efforts that have revived the species from the brink of extinction

VISCERALIMAGE/SHUTTERSTOCK

'Of all the quadrupeds that have lived upon the Earth, probably no other species has ever marshalled such innumerable hosts as those of the American bison.' These words were written by William Temple Hornaday, a 19th century American hunter and zoologist described by the Smithsonian Institution as 'the founder of the American conservation movement'.

He went on to say, 'it would have been as easy to count or to estimate the number of leaves in a forest as to calculate the number [of bison] living at any given time during the history of the species previous to 1870'.

Hornaday was attempting to educate the American public as to the plight of the bison, which by the end of the century was nearing extinction. Due to the efforts of both him and his contemporaries, today there are an estimated 500,000 bison living across North America. It's a narrative commemorated last month by the official passing of the National Bison Legacy Act, which states: 'The mammal commonly known as the North American bison is adopted as the national mammal of the US.'

'It's a remarkable story, that we should honour and reflect on,' says Keith Aune, Director of the Bison