

# Bison of the Polish forests

# ON RECORD

## New discs to note

WHEN I was in Poland recently, I saw some of the last remaining specimens of the European bison, which the Poles are gradually building up into a free-ranging herd in the forest of Bialowieza, one of its last haunts as a wild animal.

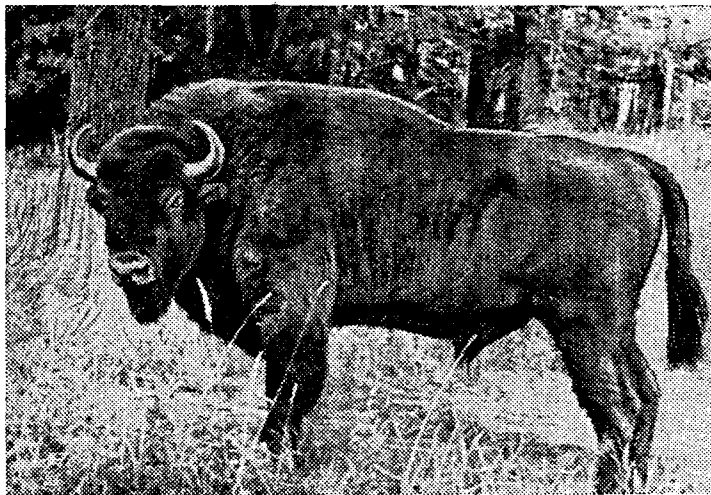
Many of my readers will have seen this bison at the London Zoo or at Woburn Park in Bedfordshire, but unfortunately these specimens are not completely pure-bred, being descended in part from hybrids between the European and North American bisons.

In former centuries the European bison ranged over the woodlands of the whole Continent, but by about a hundred years ago it had become very much reduced in numbers, and was known as a wild animal only from the Bialowieza Forest in Poland. Here it was reserved as a hunting ground for the Tsar of Russia, Poland at that time being a part of the Tsar's dominions.

### Ravages of war

In 1803, when this game reserve was set up, there were only 300 bison in it. By 1860 there were 1,500, but ten years later devastation of the herds during the Polish revolt of 1863 had reduced the numbers to 500, and by the outbreak of the First World War in 1914 there were still only 750 bison there.

The First World War brought final disaster to the wild bison of Bialowieza, and they were all killed during or soon after the war. By 1921 there were none left. Meantime, another herd of wild



A European bison in a Moscow game reservation

European bison had been discovered in the remote forests of the Caucasus. In the mid 1880s they were estimated to number 1,000, but poaching and war again reduced their numbers, so that by the time an official nature reserve was set up for them in 1924, none could be found by the responsible authorities. It is believed that the last survivor of this herd, and so the last genuinely wild European bison, was not killed till 1927.

However, there were still many European bison in zoos in various parts of the world, and an International Society for the Protection of the European Bison was founded to preserve the breed. This rescue operation was well under way when the Second World War broke out, and once more imperilled the survival of the pure-bred European bison.

Almost all the bison remaining in Germany were killed during the war, but those in Holland and Poland survived. The Poles in particular were able carefully to build up their bison population from 57 head in 1949 to 132 at the present day, and as I mentioned above they are now in a position to release some from their enclosures into the open forest (which is part of a National Park) so that they can re-establish themselves as wild animals.

The European bison differs from the American bison in several ways. To start with, it is a woodland animal, whereas the American bison is adapted to life on the open prairies. The European bison also has a smaller head, a more sharply ridged back, and less horizontal and pointed horns.

RICHARD FITTER

MIKE PRESTON: *Four Songs By Ray Noble* on Decca DFE 6635. This young singer, who has also been a successful boxer and a cartoon cameraman, is a talented musician. These songs by the famous composer Ray Noble require thought and technique, both of which young Mike provides. (EP. 10s. 11½d.)

ANDRES SEGOVIA: *Golden Jubilee Album—Volume 1* on Brunswick AXTL1088. The Golden Jubilee represented here celebrates the 50th anniversary of Segovia's first concert. Segovia began playing the guitar in public at the age of 14, and within a few years he was world-famous. He has chosen pieces by Rodrigo and Ponce for the first volume in a three-part album, and in this first volume he also includes a recorded message to commemorate the occasion. (LP. 38s. 1½d.)

VAUGHAN WILLIAMS: *Job* on Top Rank 35/068. Vaughan Williams described this as "a masque for dancing" and it did in fact become the foundation for a very fine ballet. The score tells the story of Job, his trials and his eventual triumph. The music conjures up pictures of the Devil and of Job's comforters, imitated by swooping saxophones. It is a fine work which needs to be heard many times before its full impact can be felt. Sir Adrian Boult conducts the London Philharmonic Orchestra. (LP. 35s.)

ADELE LEIGH: *Vilia; One Day When We Were Young; Something Wonderful; and One Kiss*, on Philips BBE 12379. Miss Leigh's previous records have been operatic, but, particularly through her television appearances, she is winning new admirers among those who enjoy musical comedy. This is a particularly well chosen selection of songs, including both old and new favourites. (EP. 12s. 3d.)



JERRY ALLEN and his Trio: on Top Rank BUY/050. Jerry Allen and his trio have become popular with everyone through their many television appearances, and if you are at home during lunchtime you will be familiar with the tune *Lunch Boxer*. The bouncy rhythm of the electric organ maintains a cheerful mood throughout this foot-tapping record. (LP. 22s.)



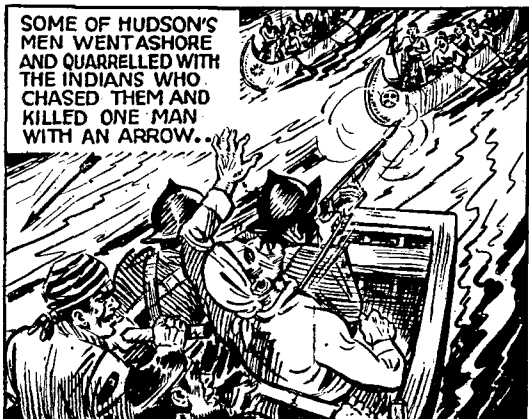
...and there are hundreds of them ashore!

## NORTH-WEST PASSAGE—Henry Hudson's great voyages (1)

Like many other people of his time, Henry Hudson believed there was a northern route to the East Indies. After two attempts to find one via the

Arctic Ocean, he set out in 1609 to find a North-West Passage. Rumours of what Indians had said about vast stretches of water in North America

(really the Great Lakes) gave him the idea that there was a way through the continent from the Atlantic coast to the Pacific Ocean.



WHAT FATE AWAITS THE FIRST ENGLISHMEN TO EXPLORE THE HUDSON? SEE NEXT WEEK'S INSTALMENT