



## **FACT SHEET - Bison Safety for Public**

Adult American bison on Catalina Island weigh between 600 - 1800 lbs, are capable of running nearly 30mph, and can jump a six foot fence from a standing position. They often appear docile but can respond defensively if they feel threatened or are provoked.

### **Preventing encounters**

The best way to prevent a negative encounter with a bison (or any wildlife for that matter), is to you use your common sense, keep your distance, observe the animal for agitated behaviors and plan ahead.

- Watch for signs of recent bison activity (fresh tracks or feces).
- Keep your head up; scan the area ahead of you, and plan escape routes as you go.
- Make noise while hiking (e.g. talking, clapping) to prevent spooking or surprising a bison.
- Solitary bulls are encountered frequently and often in unexpected places. A solitary bison may feel more vulnerable than a bison in a group.
- Avoid female bison with calves; they are extremely protective of their young.
- Stay at least 25 yards (75 ft, 23 m) away from bison. Note: there is no guaranteed safe distance.
- Avoid bison while walking your dog, keep your dog on a leash, and walk your bike once you come across a bison. Bison often respond negatively to dogs and cyclists

### **Agitated behavior**

Individual bison have several easy to observe behaviors that let you know they are agitated or uncomfortable: raising their tail up, pawing at the ground, having widened eyes, swaying their head from side-to-side, bellowing, huffing, or side-posturing.

### **Encountering bison along roads and trails**

Many of the roads and trails on Catalina are restricted on either side by high banks, thick brush or steep drop-offs. Bison like to use the roads and trails and prefer to continue in the direction they are already going. Simply moving aside from the road or trail and allowing them to pass at a safe distance is generally the easiest way to avoid an encounter.

### **How to respond if charged**

Get in the habit of planning escape routes. Look for things to hide behind (bushes, trees, poles) if a bison were to charge you. If you are charged, you want to break the bison's concentration by trying the following depending on the situation:

- Use your escape route and hide
- Act assertively, yell loudly, and/or vigorously wave your arms.
- Throw something that may break their gaze or concentration on you.
- If you cannot avoid contact, get as low to the ground as possible and protect your head and torso.
- It is reported that playing dead can sometimes stop an attack.



**Agitated bison bull – photo from flickr.com**

*For more information on bison behavior contact Conservation Department Wildlife Biologists at 310-510-1299.*