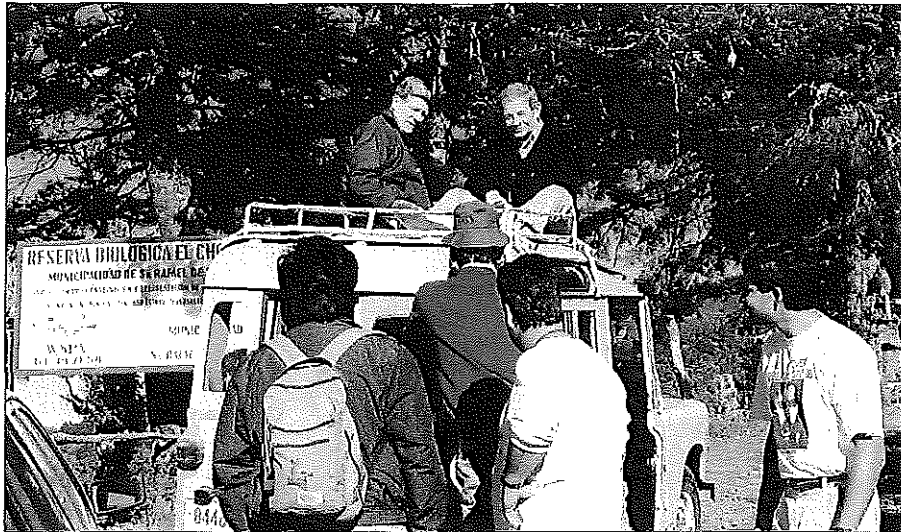


## UP FRONT



HSUS President John A. Hoyt (above, left) and others prepare to enter El Chompipe, the small mountain in Costa Rica that serves as WSPA's biological reserve.

### INTERNATIONAL

## Travels in "Tico" Land *Visiting our Central American partners*

**F**iled away in a dusty cabinet somewhere is the original certificate of incorporation of The HSUS. Relatively undisturbed for more than thirty-five years, that venerable document proclaims the lofty purposes of the organization, which include protecting all living things and furthering humane education. Especially interesting is the third purpose enumerated, "to cooperate with all international humane organizations and the humane societies of other nations in all efforts to prevent or ameliorate suffering."

Nowhere is that purpose better demonstrated than in the tiny Central American republic of Costa Rica. San José, the capital, spreads across a valley nearly midway between the Atlantic and the Pacific oceans. There the World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA) has located an office serving all of Central America and the Caribbean. Gerardo Huertas, with an able staff, manages WSPA's regional activities and operates the only animal shel-

ter in Central America.

The HSUS has long been interested in WSPA, particularly in its Western Hemisphere activities. In recent years The HSUS has been a major financial supporter of those activities. John A. Hoyt, president, K. William Wiseman, chairman of the board, and members of The HSUS's staff have served on the board of WSPA, and Mr. Hoyt has served two terms as WSPA's president. Mr. Huertas has helped to institute a humane-education program modeled on that of The HSUS in all Costa Rican schools. The HSUS's staff, officers, and directors think of WSPA's Costa Rican office as a close partner in our continuing work of animal and environmental protection.

In January a few of us decided to spend a week among the Ticos, as the Costa Ricans call themselves. We were most fortunate to have Mr. Huertas as our host and tour planner. He had counseled us to bring clothes for both warm and cold weather

as well as boots for the muddy rain-forest floor and, if we were so inclined, snorkeling equipment. Accordingly, we staggered out of the baggage area in the San José airport like overloaded pack mules as we searched for his familiar face.

We packed the luggage and ourselves into the cramped confines of a Mitsubishi minibus and bounced off through the streets of San José. Our hotel, the Bougainvillea, located on the outskirts of San José, was a gardener's work of art. Riotous splashes of fuchsia, red, and violet filled the front yard and ringed the driveway. A more extensive garden behind the hotel made for an inviting scene.

Although small, Costa Rica has been blessed with many riches, including coral reefs, beautiful beaches, rain forests, cloud forests, mountains, volcanoes, and a profuse array of plant and animal species numbering more than twelve thousand. A stable democracy and nearly three million hardworking people make life in Costa Rica better than it is in many neighboring countries.

Large areas of the country remain undisturbed by man's often-unthinking industry. Primary forests of ancient hardwood trees cast shade on palms, bamboos, philodendrons, bromeliads, orchids, vines, mosses, and fungi. Macaws, toucans, and roseate spoonbills flourish, as do hawks, kingfishers, warblers, and other birds, many of which follow the sun from North America and stay for the winter.

WSPA, like The HSUS, has recently increased its emphasis on environmental matters. With financial help from The HSUS, WSPA has become the guardian of El Chompipe, a small mountain in the municipality of San Rafael that is less than one hour's drive from San José. El Chompipe is remarkable because it is a cloud forest, covered on most days by dense clouds nourishing the lush tropical plants growing below. This one area has more species of plants and animals than exist in all of North America, and it stands at the border of the vastly larger Braulio Carrillo National Park.

The government of San Rafael has granted WSPA the right to use El Chompipe as a biological reserve for fifty years. In return, WSPA maintains the area by

posting it, guarding it, and fostering studies of its complex ecology.

Shod in our mud boots, we filled the minibus and clattered and lurched up a narrow road until one of WSPA's signs proclaimed our arrival at El Chompipe.

We were led into El Chompipe's jungles by several amicable guides, one of whom was a teaching biologist. We found complex systems of life at every level of this forest, from the busy termite activity at ground level to the serene existence of the hardwood trees whose branches hovered far above us. Orchids, bromeliads, and other air plants competed for space on nearly every tree branch, and the jungle floor was covered with the sorts of leafy plants we buy to fill our living rooms in the States.

Because it is a cloud forest, El Chompipe is always muddy. We slogged along little-used paths up and down hills, with our way occasionally eased by expert swings of a machete in the hands of one of our guides. Our boots sank into the mud until our feet disappeared. Although clouds were visible on nearby hills, the weather at El Chompipe remained sunny all day—something that happens perhaps only three times a year.

As we lunched on a grassy knoll overlooking the mountains, we had time to



*Bromeliads cover El Chompipe's jungle floor and nearly every tree branch. Complex systems of life are found at every level of the Costa Rican cloud forest.*

reflect on the fine example set by this project—cooperation between an animal-welfare organization and a municipality with the common goal of preserving a unique natural area and protecting it from the many abuses of man.

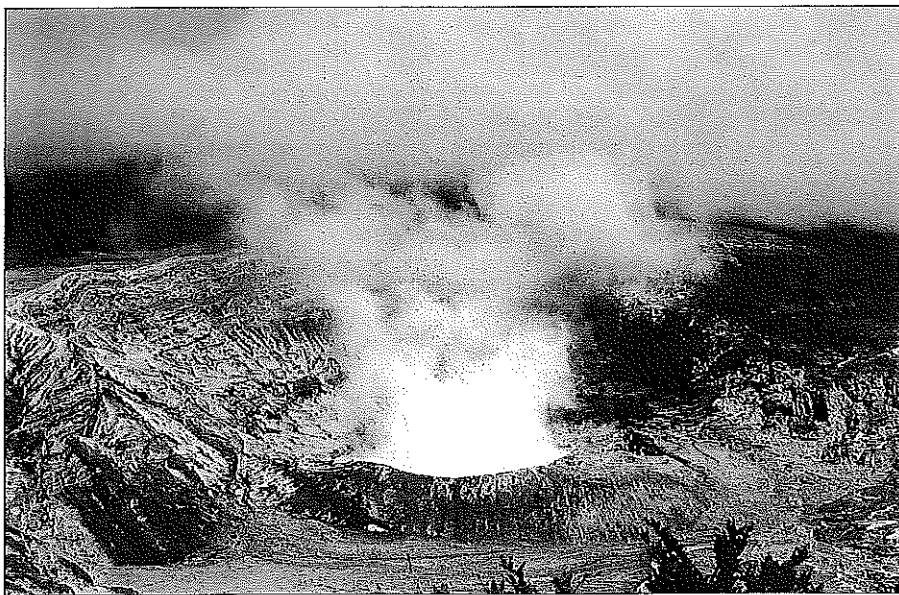
There is much more to see in Costa Rica than was possible to discover in one week there. We traveled to the northwestern province of Guanacaste, where we

stayed overnight at La Pacifica Hotel, headquarters of a biological research center. The next morning we slipped down the Bebedero River, with our guides pointing out monkeys, iguanas, and birds of all types. As we neared the ocean, the water became clouded with silt eroded from nearby irrigated fields, and drops of oil, probably from the bilges of ocean tankers, floated on the surface. These sad reminders of man's failed dominion over the Earth threaten all forms of life along the rivers.

Another day we trudged uphill to the crater of Poás, a barely active volcano on the outskirts of San José. We toured Lankester Gardens, San José's botanical park, and went twice into Braulio Carrillo National Park, a mountainous rain forest of heroic proportions.

Saved for another trip were the beautiful beaches on both coasts, snorkeling along the coral reefs, the jungle train, and turtle breeding grounds.

The Costa Ricans care about their animals, love their wildlife and the natural beauty that surrounds them, and seem genuinely pleased with the efforts of WSPA. Members of The HSUS can feel proud that they are an important part of the good things happening in that area of the world.—Leslie R. Inglis, member, HSUS board of directors



*The crater of Poás, a barely active volcano on the outskirts of San José, is one of the spectacular sights for visitors to Costa Rica.*

## INVESTIGATIONS

# Condemned to Roam No More

## *Bison shot for crossing invisible lines*

**B**ison once roamed approximately 80 percent of the contiguous forty-eight states. Their numbers and the extent of their range were unequaled by any other North American species. Only the vast herds of wildlife in Africa at the turn of the century could rival this country's bison herds as the most breathtaking and awesome spectacle in nature.

Today the last remnants of those great herds are found in Montana, primarily in Yellowstone National Park. The northern herd, whose habitat is the Lamar Valley, and the Mary Mountain herd, which roams throughout the western part of Yellowstone, collectively represent the last truly wild bison in North America.

For a variety of political reasons, a confusing and seemingly irrational management plan instituted by the National Park Service (NPS) and the U.S. Department of the Interior calls for the elimination, by hunting, of any bison that cross outside the boundaries of Yellowstone as part of their natural winter migration.\* Because the winter of 1990-91 was remarkably mild, most Yellowstone bison did not migrate out of the park to seek forage. As a result, as of early February no killing of bison in significant numbers had taken place.

Such a fluke of nature provides only a temporary reprieve for the bison, however. Despite widespread public opposition to the hunt in previous years, a federal judge has ruled that it should be held if and when Yellowstone officials believe it is needed. The state of Montana is prepared to allow hunters to kill any bison that cross outside park boundaries.

Strangely, bison crossed park boundaries between 1960 and 1984, but no federal or

state mandate calling for their execution was deemed necessary then. In defending the subsequent requirement, NPS officials argue that those earlier migrations involved much fewer animals than did the more recent ones. They also say that had all of the more than 500 animals that left Yellowstone in 1989 not been shot, some would have stayed on private lands instead of returning to the park when foraging conditions improved.

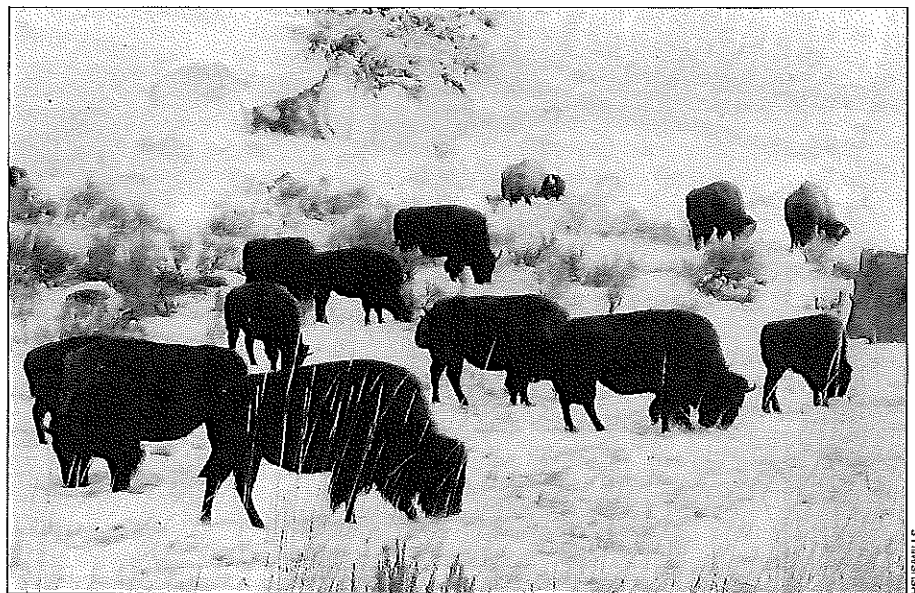
HSUS senior scientist Tony Povilitis and I spent eight days at Yellowstone in December in an attempt to gain a better understanding of the factors behind the decision to hold the bison hunts. Our goal was to gain firsthand information from both NPS officials and Montana residents.

It is important to realize that the hunted bison are the same animals that are photographed and observed by hordes of visitors during the spring and summer.

Throughout the park's tourist season the animals are conditioned to regard close encounters with people as nonthreatening. There is no way for them to learn that creatures who have come within thirty yards of them with cameras thousands of times in the summer will approach with rifles in the winter. They do not understand the concept of arbitrary boundaries. Habituated to the presence of human beings all summer, they have no protective impulse to flee from danger even after they have heard shots and seen other bison fall to the ground.

In 1985 Montana entered into an unholy alliance with the Department of the Interior through the NPS. The result was state legislation that allowed the killing of the Yellowstone bison that leave the park during the winter. There were three rationales for that rule change: to guarantee that Montana would continue to be classified as a brucellosis-free state, to reduce the incidence of private-property damage caused by bison wandering outside the park, and to reduce the chances that bison would injure members of the public.

After a thorough investigation of those three rationales, The HSUS has concluded that they are not sufficient to justify the killing of bison that cross park boundaries. In particular, the brucellosis argument



*The state of Montana is prepared to allow hunters to kill any bison that cross outside Yellowstone's boundaries. The HSUS believes that such a plan is unjustified.*

\* A small group of bison in Yellowstone's Pelican Valley stays within the park's boundaries and is not affected by the current management plan.

appears to be a classic red herring; it sanctions the hunting of bison on the grounds that the practice is necessary for the health and well-being of Montana's cattle industry. There appears to us to be a hidden agenda that involves the whole question of land use and sacrifices the restoration and viability of native wildlife on public lands to the NPS's convenience in meeting the irrational and destructive demands of Montana's government.

Brucellosis is a serious disease that, under certain circumstances, causes undulant fever in human beings. Since 1940 the U.S. Department of Agriculture has conducted a nationwide brucellosis-eradication program. Once a state is classified as brucellosis-free, livestock can be shipped without being tested for the disease.

Brucellosis is normally transmitted by

female bison, which shed bacteria through visceral fluids or membranes during abortive births. It therefore seems patently unnecessary to shoot bull bison; they pose little risk as a brucellosis threat. In any case, no cattle are within the bison's range in winter, when the bison cross outside the park's western boundary, so there is little threat of livestock contamination from bison of either sex.

In the northern area of the park, where 569 bison were slaughtered in 1988-89, only sixty to seventy cattle were in the entire Paradise Valley (the twelve-square-mile range that the bison use during winter). Clearly, alternative management practices such as the vaccination and temporary removal of cattle could be effective and nonlethal means of reducing any risk of brucellosis transmission from bison to cattle.

Elk as well as bison carry the dreaded *Brucella abortus*, and they too wander all over Yellowstone and nearby areas, yet nobody talks of eradicating elk that cross outside park boundaries. Why not? The reason is that such a policy would have a severe impact on the profitable and popular elk hunting season; the hunt occurs on lands outside the park.

Montana's position (as articulated by the state veterinarian's office) is clearly that even one bison's wandering out of the park threatens the state's brucellosis-free status and therefore poses an unacceptable risk. The state maintains that because bison migration involves large herds, it creates conditions that facilitate brucellosis transmission. Supposedly, having solitary elk wander on and off park property does not create conditions favoring brucellosis transmission and therefore represents a

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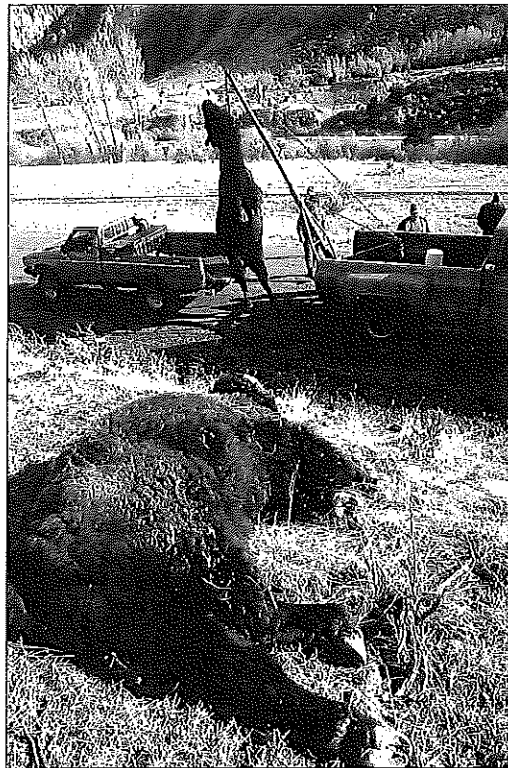
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minimal risk. Yet no one has ever assessed the probability of brucellosis transmission from bison or elk to cattle under actual field conditions. Only one study, performed by Texas A&M University, concluded that the bacteria can be transferred to cattle, and such a transfer was achieved only under optimum clinical conditions. Clearly, given the alternatives, what we know about the control of brucellosis could not possibly justify the slaughter of Yellowstone's bison.

The issues of private-property damage and public safety appear to have been hastily conceived afterthoughts intended to shore up Montana and NPS officials' weak position on brucellosis control. Dan Sholly, chief ranger for Yellowstone National Park, has stated that to his knowledge, only one complaint of property damage has been brought against the NPS since 1980. Local residents expect a certain amount of damage to fences by all wildlife species each year. Some residents point out that bison usually do damage when people try to herd them up and move them or when they panic after being exposed to intensive shooting.

The public-safety argument is the most transparent attempt to con the public into supporting the government's bison slaughter. The only instances of bison's harming humans that any Yellowstone official could cite involved park visitors walking too close to the animals, to take their picture or pet them. Not surprisingly, the bison tended to express their displeasure over such a breach of etiquette by either horning the offender in the rear or hurling him/her into the air. (Yellowstone bison are accustomed to humans' presence, but in no way are they tame.) No fatalities are known to have occurred.

It can be argued that the NPS is at least partially responsible for the bison's winter wandering. Its expanded winter management plan calls for grooming trails and roads for snowmobile use. Cleared trails are energy-efficient avenues for bison seeking their winter range. Closing areas in the bison's winter range to snowmobiles could help limit the migration, but that seems unlikely to become an option, given the



Artist Charles M. Russell said of the bison, "He was one of nature's biggest gifts, and this country owes him thanks." Instead, hunters hope for the opportunity to repeat 1989's slaughter of bison that stray outside Yellowstone.

public's enthusiasm for snowmobiling. In any case, the bison have now learned of the availability of a more desirable winter range and are unlikely to lose their natural tendency to wander.

Powerful ranching interests control much of the state, including the public land. The state veterinarian's office has joined forces with the state's hunting lobby to form an alliance that exerts a formidable influence on the political process. The time-honored view that the land is for the express use of human beings still prevails. The reasoning behind that view goes something like this: "We eliminated buffalo once already, and we don't want them to repopulate and become viable again. Land's for cattle; bison, bears, and wolves are a plague on the face of the Earth. If you want a few bison around for the city folk to watch and take pictures of, that's fine with us, but keep them on your side of the park."

It's not fine with those of us who work

for the protection of animals and care about the integrity of public lands. The HSUS is determined to see an end to the hunting of Yellowstone bison. In the Winter 1991 *HSUS News*, the society's president, John A. Hoyt, called for a halt to the execution of an American symbol and issued a poignant plea for HSUS members to help galvanize public opposition to a lethal management scheme.

Lawsuits impugning the legality of the hunt itself have proved fruitless. The HSUS is therefore investigating the possibility of mounting a legal challenge to the entire management plan of Yellowstone National Park. We believe that the park's management plan, which guarantees the deaths of hundreds of bison a year, stands in stark contrast to the intent of Congress and the citizens of the United States in setting aside Yellowstone as a national park.

In addition, The HSUS has proposed the establishment of a buffer zone around the park. In conjunction with a brucellosis vaccination program, a buffer zone would eliminate even the most remote possibility of an outbreak of bison-transmitted brucellosis among cattle.

Public outrage, legal challenges, and scientific means of bison management can resolve the conflict without requiring the death of even one more bison.

Bison are adaptive, gregarious, playful, and surprisingly quick and attentive. Our empathy and admiration for these rugged survivors should lead us to demand that the NPS develop a plan that does not result in having more bison heads displayed as trophies on den walls.

The HSUS is committed to a nonlethal resolution to the annual controversy, not just because the bison is an American icon and a national treasure but also because the unnecessary killing of even a single bison diminishes us as a compassionate people and lends hypocrisy to our justification for national parks. Most Americans conceive of a national park as an inviolate sanctuary for wildlife. The sight of a dead bison bleeding in the snow shatters that illusion.—David K. Wills, vice president of investigations