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IT'S BABY ANIMAL SEASON AT NORTHWEST TREK WILDLIFE PARK, AND BISON CALVES MAKE THEIR APPEARANCES JUST IN TIME FOR THE MEMORIAL DAY HOLIDAY WEEKEND

Three adorable bison calves were born over the last week, and keepers expect additional calves among the herds of bison and elk in the wildlife park's unique Free-Roaming Area in coming weeks

EATONVILLE, Wash. – They wobble around a bit at first, but their little legs grow steadier as days go by. And there's nothing quite like watching a newborn bison calf – its fur a distinctive reddish-orange color – hurrying to keep up with its mama, then ducking its head under her girth to nurse.



A bison cow attends to her newborn calf in the Free-Roaming Area at Northwest Trek Wildlife Park.

Three bison calves arrived at Northwest Trek Wildlife Park over the last week, and more animal births are expected in the coming days and weeks as calving, lambing and fawning season gets into full swing among herds of American bison, Roosevelt elk, woodland caribou, bighorn sheep and Columbia black-tailed deer.

In addition, goslings already are following their Canada geese mothers around the grounds.

Visitors may spot the newborns during a 50-minute, naturalist-narrated tour of the wildlife park's 435-acre Free-Roaming Area aboard a comfortable tram.

"It's a wonderful time to come and view these animals roaming amid natural habitat of meadows and forests," said Northwest Trek Zoological Curator Marc Heinzman. "Everyone loves to see newborn animals, and we urge visitors to come back a few times throughout the spring and summer to watch them grow."

Those reddish-orange bison calves, for example, will stick close to their mamas for quite some time, then gradually gain more independence. And as they grow, their fur will turn the darker brown shade of their parents.

The American bison is the national mammal, Heinzman pointed out.



“We are proud that people can come to the wildlife park to view and learn about these uniquely American animals,” he said.

Though they once roamed America’s Great Plains by the millions, bison were coveted for their meat and pelts, and their numbers dwindled to only about 1,000 scattered across the country by the early 1900s.

Careful conservation planning by committed groups, including the American Bison Society, was used to regrow herds.

Northwest Trek’s bison herd traces its roots to Oct. 13, 1971.



At that time, six animals from the National Bison Range in Montana, were contributed by federal authorities to the fledgling wildlife park, Northwest Trek co-founder David T. “Doc” Hellyer wrote in his memoir, “At the Forest’s Edge.”

The bison herd was well established when the wildlife park opened its gates to visitors nearly 42 years ago, on July 17, 1975.

In addition to the tram tour of the Free-Roaming Area, every ticket to Northwest Trek comes with the opportunity to wander forested pathways and stop at exhibits featuring black bears, wolves, foxes, a coyote, Canada lynx, bobcats, river otters, beavers and other animals in natural habitats.

Also free with membership or admission to the wildlife park is the opportunity for kids from toddlers through tweens to explore the half-acre, nature-inspired Kids’ Trek playground.

At top: A bison calf nurses in the Free-Roaming Area at Northwest Trek Wildlife Park. Above, a gosling follows its Canada goose mother through the meadow.

Children have hours of fun on the play structures, splashing in the stream, building creative structures out of sand and sticks, and getting closer to nature in the half-acre play area.

Northwest Trek is open from 9:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Mondays through Fridays, and until 5 p.m. on Saturdays and Sundays. The wildlife park will be open on Memorial Day.

For more information about Northwest Trek, go to www.nwtrek.org.

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Northwest Trek, accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums, is a 725-acre zoological park dedicated to conservation, education and recreation by displaying, interpreting and researching native Northwest wildlife and their natural habitats. The wildlife park is a facility of Metro Parks Tacoma and is located 35 miles southeast of Tacoma off State Highway 161.

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