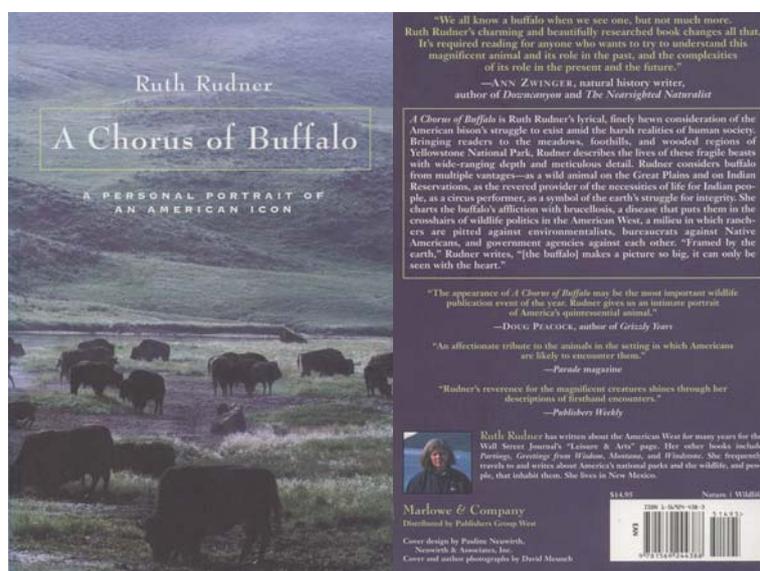


Rudner, R. 2000. A chorus of buffalo. A personal portrait of an American icon. – New York, Marlowe & Company

Book review by N. den Ouden



Wildlife should not be on display. It should simply be. Yet we all crave connection with it. It's why we drive vehicles called Cougars and Rams and Eagles. It's why we call our schoolteams Bobcats or Grizzlies or Panthers or Hawks. It's why we wear shirts with wolves embroidered on them or buy paintings of lions and falcons. There are a hundred ways in which we take the emblem of a wild animal to represent us. We may think it's style, but, in fact it's connection. "You are what you eat", my mother told me when I was little. So I wanted to eat bears. When, years later, I was finally offered bear meat, I ate it as a holy ritual, knowing what it was I took inside me, whose flesh I made my flesh. I feel the same way when I eat buffalo meat. We hunt because we identify with the animals we hunt. We are anti hunting because we identify with those same animals. Anyway you do it, you never get away from the connection. (p. 129)

I expected the book to be about the history of the bison, the decimation of the herds in the 19th century and about its present status. I expected it to be the story of the bison, or buffalo as they tend to call them in America, and although the bison is the main theme of this book, it is much more a book about the people dealing with these majestic animals and their emotions. It is about the environmentalists doing everything in their power to ensure the herds' existence; about the native Indians whose entire history is interwoven with that of the bison; and about the ranchers, who have to protect their cattle against the thread of brucellosis, a cattle disease that might be spread by the migrating bison herds. Most people in America know the lyrics to 'Home on the Range' by heart. This book makes clear, however, that not everyone is jumping at the idea of having a 'home where the buffalo roam.'

The book is well-written. It has a good flow, with a good balance between fact and emotion and the Great Plains atmosphere really comes across. The author never shies away of giving her own opinions, but describes the opposite views in such a way that allows the reader to make up his or her own mind.

I wanted to draw your attention to this book, because its story does not just apply to the bison. We see the same sort of problems when we look at the conservation and re-integration of wolves in the Pyrenees, brown bears in Eastern Europe, large cats (mountain lions, cougars and bobcats) in the US, tigers in India, Przewalski horses in China, etc. All of these species could easily become extinct within the next few years, but where wildlife and people both struggle for survival, often the wildlife conservation does not get first priority.

Rudner, R. 2000. A chorus of buffalo. A personal portrait of an American icon. – New York, Marlowe & Company. 181 pp. ISBN 1-56924-438-3. Price \$14.95 (paperback).