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Bison lick each other's wounds after a traumatic experience

Communal wound licking has been documented in a hoofed mammal for the first time. American bison may use the behavior to boost social connections and reduce stress

6 May 2023 By [Corryn Wetzel](#) <Link> paywall



A bison licking the wound of another bison in British Columbia, Canada | T.S. Jung

American bison have been observed licking each other's wounds, a stress-reducing behavior not documented in a hoofed mammal until now.

When animals sustain injuries, licking is often the first line of defense for [wound](#) care. Licking a laceration or puncture can remove debris that causes infection and help wounds heal faster. The saliva of some animals – including humans – has antibacterial properties and supports tissue and nerve regrowth.

While female bison have been observed grooming unrelated [calves](#), reports of animals licking the wounds of others have largely been limited to captive rats and wild primates, such as chimpanzees.

The discovery of bison wound licking was made in September 2022, after two female American bison (*Bison bison*) were tranquilized with darts as part of routine research.

[Thomas S. Jung](#) at the Department of Environment, Government of Yukon in Canada and his colleagues sampled the animals' hair, feces and blood, and attached a GPS collar to one of the females. After finishing the collaring and sample collection, they ensured the puncture wounds were clean and then left the bison to wake from a drug-induced slumber.

The following day, when they checked whether the bison were back in their herd and doing well, the researchers saw and photographed a female bison licking the dart wound of one of the females that had been tranquilized. The bison licked her herd member's injury for around a minute before a male bison joined in, pushing aside the uninjured female and licking the wound for 2 more minutes.

Then, a different male began grooming the wound of the second darted female bison for around 2 minutes. In both cases, the females being groomed didn't move away and continued to graze on grasses.