

1 Choosing the hide for your Drum

The principal difference between the synthetic hand drum (such as a Remo drum) and the shamanic medicine drum is that when we birth a drum in ceremony from an animal hide processed in a mindful and traditional way, energetically we are bringing new life back to the spirit of the animal from which the hide came - this is why we call it a “birthing”. For this reason, I attach great importance to the sourcing of hides, believing that the energetic properties of each individual hide start with how that animal has lived, how it has died, and then how the hide is processed. In the same way that a building will hold an energetic imprint of those who have occupied it and the deeds carried out through its history, the same can be said of an animal hide. All the hides I source are processed by hand in a traditional way from people I know that work in ceremony, truly honouring the spirit of the animal which has passed. I have built relations with these people over many years.

In practice, the processing of fresh hides into “rawhide” involves slipping the hair with lime, stretching the hide on a wooden frame and scraping off all connective tissue before leaving it to dry naturally. I never source hides which are factory processed - such processes are not ceremonial, are very mechanical, and also damaging to the environment.

Choosing the hide for your drum is a big decision. It’s also one not to be overthought - intuition plays a big part here, stepping past our egoic self to connect with that which deeply resonates with us at a soul level. The hide of our drum represents the animal totem, the spiritual and shamanic qualities of the animal from which the drum will be born. Different animals possess different qualities spiritually and energetically.

1.1 Deer

Deer represents grace and tenderness, tempered with strength. It teaches us to listen to the wisdom of our Higher Self, whilst showing us the easiest path along life’s journey. Deer Spirit acts when obstacles lie in our path. It is also a playmate for our inner child, reminding us of child-like innocence.

Deer medicine is strongly connected to the heart chakra. Where there is ambition, there is also love for inspiration. As a fawn, deer is often left on its own. It protects itself by remaining perfectly still, curled up in the ferns and long grass, and is perfectly camouflaged. If a predator comes close, it remains perfectly still, trusting in its safety. The female deer is very protective of its young fawn, and also knows it is safe when left. When running from a predator, the deer’s speed, its ability to navigate an escape, and its huge leaps over obstacles are both power-filled and graceful. And so, Deer Spirit acts in our life as a teacher of how to be gentle, and yet determined and sure-footed even in difficult situations. Remember that a gentle soul is not a helpless one.



When we work with Deer medicine, we are invoking all of these qualities as part of our prayerful intention. We are connecting with its teachings - we are reminded to find the balance in being still, in moving with grace, and in the wise use of our power to navigate through life’s challenges.

The deer hides I source for drum birthing are wild Red Deer from the Highlands of Scotland. Since the demise of its natural predator, the wolf, in the 15th Century, deer populations in the UK have been managed by controlled humane culling. This is necessary firstly to maintain the health of the herd, and also to protect the environment - deer can have a devastating effect on new trees, and if they do not have enough food, will quickly succumb to sickness. Deer management is strictly regulated, and wild deer are culled by skilled licensed stalkers, and in numbers sufficient only to protect the health of the individual herd. Culled deer is then processed into meat to supply what has become a popular venison market. The hides typically are thrown away, they are mostly considered an unwanted byproduct - deer hide is not that suitable for rugs (unlike, for example, reindeer), because it sheds its hair. I source deer hides from individuals who source their hides direct from the stalkers and who process the hide by hand in small numbers and in a traditional way.

1.2 Bison

Bison (also known as buffalo) is the great ruler of the American Plains. It symbolises abundance - it provided for all the needs of the Plains First Nations, including food, clothing, shelter, and spiritual tools. Its mere presence commands respect, and it is a force to be honoured. The bison spirit animal is a wise teacher of living in balance with the Great Mother.

When Bison appears as your Spirit Animal, abundance and liberation are on the way. Bison belongs to the most earth-centred and selfless souls, and brings you the strength to carry heavy loads. Buffalo teaches us to become personally empowered whilst relieving ourselves of the unnecessary burden of emotional baggage.

Bison also teaches us about community. Of all the animal kingdom, Buffalo will turn to face the storm, protecting its young, sick and elderly at the centre of the herd, and marches forward as one, with its strongest bulls at the front of the herd, flanked by the other bulls. As the bulls at the front tire, they drop back and are replaced with the bulls at the flank, so that the young, the sick, and the elderly remain protected at all times. And so, Bison teaches us to march through life's storms - to confront those situations which we may find difficult and challenging - and to protect those in our community.

The First Nation of the Americas used to hunt American Plains Bison, which roamed freely. The wild bison population in the US declined from around 8 million to less than 500 by the end of the 19th Century. Partly this was due to the American government at that time wilfully slaughtering bison in huge numbers in order to compromise the independence of nomadic First Nation tribes, who traditionally followed the migration of bison herds over thousands of miles. In removing this most important source of food, clothing and shelter from the First Nation people, the government was able to take those ancestral tribal lands and relegate those tribes to official "reservations". The hides I source are processed from small independently run bison ranches. Whilst these bison are in effect farmed, they have a huge range totalling in places thousands of acres in which to roam freely. Please beware of anyone selling a "buffalo" drum. Often, these are in fact the hides of water buffalo, which is a completely different species, originating in South East Asia. Typically these hides are produced in factories, which cause a lot of environmental pollution.



1.3 Horse

The horse holds deep significance in Celtic mythology, symbolizing various qualities and embodying a connection between humans and the spiritual realm. Revered as a symbol of power, grace, and freedom, the horse represents journeys, both physical and spiritual. In Celtic lore, Epona is a prominent goddess associated with horses and horsemanship. She is regarded as a protector of horses, a fertility goddess, and a symbol of abundance.



Rhiannon, another significant figure, is often depicted riding a white horse and is associated with sovereignty, enchantment, and the Otherworld. Macha, a goddess associated with sovereignty and war, possesses a powerful horse-like aspect, known for her incredible speed and strength.

In shamanic traditions, the horse holds powerful symbolism as a spiritual ally and guide. The horse represents freedom, strength, and swift movement, enabling shamans to traverse between realms. The concept of the "wind-horse" symbolizes the energy and vitality that propels shamans on their visionary journeys. The shaman's horse is a sacred conduit, aiding in spiritual transformation and facilitating connections with the spirit world. Through its symbolic presence, the horse in shamanic traditions embodies the ability to transcend boundaries, navigate the unseen realms, and access profound wisdom and healing.

The horse hides I source for drum birthing come from a ranch in Oregon and are strictly “natural death” hides – the horse is not killed. These hides by their nature are extremely difficult to obtain. If I happen to have Horse in stock, this is a rare opportunity.

1.4 Elk

Elk is a symbol of strength, stamina, and pride in many cultures. It represents a connection to the earth and nature, as well as the ability to navigate and adapt to the challenges of life with grace and dignity.

The Elk spirit animal brings with it a sense of power, courage, and independence. Those who resonate with the Elk as their spirit animal are often strong and confident individuals who are not afraid to stand up for what they believe in.



The power of the Elk as a spirit animal lies in its ability to inspire and empower individuals to embrace their inner strength and capabilities. It encourages a sense of determination and drive to overcome obstacles and achieve success.

Native American tribes hold the elk in high esteem and consider him a relative—a relative who brings strength, endurance, and patience. Tribal Nations each value the elk and place it as a teacher in many stories told through oral tradition. The elk is a survivor and a protector bringing good omens to people.

Today, the North American elk is primarily found west of the Mississippi River, especially in the Rocky Mountain states and the Pacific Northwest. There are at least one million elk living in the United States, and they are hunted legally in certain states.

I source my elk hides for drum birthing from a fellow who processes hides obtained from licensed hunters. Very few of these hides are available each year from my supplier, and demand is very high. If I happen to have Elk in stock, this is a rare opportunity.