Black-Tailed Prairie Dog

*(Cynomys ludovicianus)*

**Kingdom:** Animalia  
**Phylum:** Chordata  
**Class:** Mammalia  
**Order:** Rodentia  
**Family:** Sciuridae

The black-tailed prairie dog is a large, burrowing, ground squirrel belonging to a group of four other prairie dog species found only in North America. The black-tailed prairie dog is the most abundant and widely distributed prairie dog.

Black-tailed prairie dogs are a yellowish tan on the back and lighter on the belly. They have a short tail that is tipped with black. Their ears are short and an average adult weighs about two pounds. Prairie dogs are active only during daylight hours and spend a lot of time feeding and socializing.

Colonies or "towns" are established in areas that have been heavily grazed by cattle. Since they do not like tall grass, they will choose a site which has little vegetation. Here, the prairie dog feels secure and able to see predators coming from a long distance. Burrows are usually quite visible because of the large mound of dirt around the entrance. Mounds provide both a vantage point and protection from flooding.

Forbs are preferred over grasses for food so competition with cattle is still questionable. Prairie dogs will, however, clip off many grass species for better visibility, adding to the denuded look of a town.

Prairie dog tunnels extend downward from 3-10 feet and then horizontally for another 10-15 feet. These systems are arranged so that wind blows through and provides ventilation to their homes. Several tunnels are excavated from the main tunnel to provide nesting areas and places to rest and avoid the hotter part of summer days. Prairie dogs also use these tunnels during the winter to escape bad weather and the cold. They do not hibernate like the true ground squirrels, but do remain dormant in the nest during the peak of winter. On nice days, they can be seen on the surface.
Prairie dogs mate from early March to early April. A month later, 4-6 young are born. In 5-6 weeks, the pups come above ground and can forage on green vegetation. By the end of the summer, they have almost reached adult size. Adults in the wild seldom live over four years.

Only about 1 percent of the habitat remains of what was historically prairie dog town. Breaking native ground for farming and poisoning to eliminate competition for cattle grazing has taken its toll. The problem is that many other wildlife species also thrive on the presence of prairie dog towns. The black-footed ferret, which once preyed solely on prairie dogs, has vanished. Other species such as the badger, coyote, eagle, and burrowing owl are also negatively effected by the loss of a food source and living quarters. Hunting is legal for this species but does not harm a population. If anything, it keeps present towns from expanding so far that landowners want to eliminate them entirely.
DIET

A.M
3 carrots
2 sweet potatoes
3 apples
Lettuce
Omnivore chow

P.M
2 hands full of grapes
2 oranges or bananas (cut up)
With some rodent or monkey chow