



# Be a friend to PRAIRIE DOGS



Albuquerque's prairie dogs are the descendants of vast underground prairie dog towns that existed long before our city. Since then, prairie dogs have been decimated to just 1% of their original population size.

Prairie dogs are the architects of the American prairie, the grasslands that used to cover much of our country. They are known as a "keystone" species because they benefit the soil, plants, and over 100 wildlife species.

Urban prairie dogs are trapped in small pockets of land, such as undeveloped lots, roadsides, and traffic intersections. When their colonies pop up in

unwanted places, their existence is threatened.

You'll mainly see prairie dogs between April and October. They are active during daytime, and most energetic around dawn and dusk. Prairie dogs breed once a year in the spring and have an average of 4 pups. Pups emerge from the burrow in June. Many will not survive their first year.

## Prairie dogs need your help

Prairie dogs have faced much persecution from humans, and their population has been dramatically depleted. Even today, they are being shot, poisoned, drowned, and bulldozed. **You can help dispel common misconceptions about prairie dogs** by talking to your friends and neighbors.

- **Prairie dogs are not at fault for bare and sparsely vegetated sites in our city:** such sites attract prairie dogs because they have been disturbed and exposed by human activity. Prairie dogs value locations that allow good visibility, as our grasslands once did.
- **Prairie dogs don't transmit plague – fleas do.** It's extremely rare for humans to catch plague, and we

don't get it from prairie dogs. But prairie dogs are susceptible to plague and die within 2 to 3 days of infection; entire colonies can be wiped out by this disease.

- **Prairie dog numbers are declining,** not overpopulating.
- **Prairie dogs and cattle benefit each other.** Prairie dogs' clipping of pasture forage creates a shorter, but more nutrient-rich blade of grass. In many grassland habitats, both cattle and bison prefer to graze on prairie dog colonies.
- **Prairie dogs are very intelligent.** They have a sophisticated language with over 200 words. They form sentences that describe intruders, such as people and dogs, by color, size, and shape.

## ACTION TIPS

Be a friend to Prairie dogs! Here's what you can do.

### TIP #1

#### Enjoy the Prairie dogs!

- Prairie dogs have a complex and interesting social life. You can see them on their lookout posts, communicate with each other, cuddle, and kiss.
- Prairie dogs also attract other wildlife. If you enjoy having wildlife around, prairie dogs provide endless opportunities for wildlife watching.
- Be sure to let prairie dogs be wild and don't feed them.

### TIP #2

#### Use barriers to keep Prairie dogs out

In urban areas where conflicts could arise, such as a soccer field or large open garden, you can erect barriers to prevent prairie dogs from settling.

- The best barriers are at least 3 feet high and opaque.
- Artificial barriers can include fencing with poultry wire or a wide metal strip at the bottom.
- Natural barriers such as dense shrubs can be effective visual obstructions.
- Straw bales can also serve as visual barriers.

### TIP #3

#### Practice mindful gardening

- Prairie dogs love the disturbed soil that goes along with intensive gardening.
- When working the soil, keep that area out of view and it won't attract prairie dogs.

### TIP #4

#### Don't use rodenticides

- Poisons will kill not only prairie dogs but endanger the health of many other species that feed on prairie dogs.
- Rodenticides also put children and pets at risk.

### TIP #5

#### Ask for help if Prairie dogs appear in unwanted places

- If you see prairie dog holes popping up in unwanted places (such as sports fields, parks, playgrounds, trailheads), talk to your fellow community members about humane solutions.
- Prairie dog colonies can be relocated if necessary.
- Ask the City or the volunteer group, Prairie Dog Pals, for help.

## NEED HELP?



To request a relocation of prairie dogs, contact Prairie Dog Pals at 505-296-1937 or [prairiedogpals@prairiedogpals.org](mailto:prairiedogpals@prairiedogpals.org).

For more information on coexisting with our Albuquerque wildlife, visit [cabq.gov/coexistwithwildlife](http://cabq.gov/coexistwithwildlife)