



# PRAIRIE DOG TALES



THE "IN DEPTH" PERIODICAL  
WE BURROW INTO THE ISSUES TO DIG OUT THE DETAILS ON MATTERS AFFECTING PRAIRIE DOGS... AND THEIR PALS.

Volume 5, Issue 2

Fall 2011

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Many voices contributed to our newsletter this time. You'll find first-hand accounts from several of our core volunteers, tireless staff, and loyal board members. You'll even read a personal first-hand account from a rescue herself! Please let us know if you like these first person perspectives and enjoy seeing contributions from our diverse voices in the future!

## Prairie Dog Pals Updates

### The Beginning of Prairie Dog Season

First... an interesting fact: Ground Hog Day owes its true origins to the ancient Greeks who believed that an animal's shadow was its soul, blackened by the past year's sins. While an animal hibernates, its soul is cleansed by nature. But if the animal awakens before winter is over, it is horrified to see its dirty shadow and returns to its den for more purification.

Not having ground hogs here in the West, we recognize February 2<sup>nd</sup> as Prairie Dog Day. For us, it also heralds the beginning of prairie dog season. Our season is actually split into two parts. As soon as adult prairie dogs emerge in the spring, we begin trapping and flushing. Our goal is to catch as many

*Continued on page 2*

## Suburbans – Old and Older

Ever faithful Cynomys, our 1987 Suburban, has been utterly reliable for so many years that it seemed our run of good luck could never end. During a recent trip to the garage for warped rotors, bad knuckles, and assorted other steering issues, they also topped up the tranny with fluid. Unfortunately, Paul E. and Ellie C. subsequently got stranded on Paseo Del Norte. Fortunately, they were in town and without prairie dogs in tow. Between Paul E. and Ed U., they were able to resurrect the recalcitrant tranny to life and creep back to the staging facility. From there, they started out again with two vehicles in cortège to our mechanic of many years.

We recognized that another breakdown could prove dangerous for crew and rescues alike. As we were in the middle of the season, every day Cynomys lay idle meant missed opportunities to rescue more prairie dogs. So, we made the wallet busting decision to replace the transmission. While enduring the forced furlough, Prairie Dog Pals began to look for a back-up vehicle. Sidelineing and repairing Cynomys was difficult, but we juggled our work to meet obligations all over Albuquerque. Two weeks later the repairs were finished, and Cynomys was once again on the road.

Finding a back-up vehicle proved more difficult. The first one we looked at had no spunk. The second one was too much; a 7.5-liter turbocharged diesel would not do. The third... well, the tranny was balky... and so on. Even the sleek caddy dealer had less than desirable offerings and would not discount for obviously found faults. Twenty-five (25!) vehicles later, we finally found a suitable vehicle. With a somewhat hitchy beginning, Prairie Dog Pals now owns a second Suburban, a young puppy at only 14 years old now named New Blue. But Prairie Dog Pals' bank account is anemic ❖

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 1 Prairie Dog Pal Updates
- 14 Prairie Dog Fostering
- 16 Prairie Dogs in the News
- 17 Prairie Dog Coalition Meeting
- 19 In Memoriam
- 19 Future Plans

adults pre-pup season as possible; once they mate, there are so many more prairie dogs to catch.

At some point though, we have to stop trapping/flushing, or we will capture females about to give birth. This is not good for them or us. Gunnison prairie dogs have a 5-week gestation period. But when exactly does this 5-week period start? Well... it depends on when the prairie dogs wake from their winter's sleep, how much food is available, the ambient temperature, etc... etc... With so many unknowns, that equation is pretty much impossible to solve.

Once the pups are born, there is a 5-week weaning period. If we were to trap a lactating female, her pups would starve to death in the burrow. So when can we start trapping and flushing again -- not until the pups emerge from the burrows themselves, i.e. are able to eat on their own. And that of course depends on when they were born. So you can see, there is a window in late spring, when we cannot trap or flush due to pup season.

This year we hoped for a later emergence due to the very cold weather. Warmer ground, warmer foamy water, and warmer air temperatures would allow for safer rescue by flushing. The second week in June is usually a safe date to begin trapping and flushing. However, as we once again learned, "where there is a will there is a way", and in nature, there are few rules, mostly adaptations. This year the pups surfaced in late May. ❖

### **Landau: From Prairie Dog Colony To Domestic Dog Park**

There was some urgency to restart rescuing at Landau because the city was anxious to resume construction of the dog park. We had already rescued 33 prairie dogs in the spring, but we worried that too cautious a pup-season safety window would allow re-infiltration of whole families back into their ancient burrow systems there. We observed the site for several days; the pups looked healthy and of satisfactory size. But just in case there were any late-born pups still in the burrows, we decided to trap first.

We were fairly confident that we had pretty much cleared the site before pup season, but were alarmed to count at least 12-15 prairie dogs when we resumed work in May. Fortunately, we have a great relationship with the city administration. When we explained our concerns to David Flores of Parks & Recreation, he was able to stop the work altogether. He rescheduled the entire project, idling heavy equipment and reassigning operators to other work, giving Prairie Dog Pals one last shot to capture the remaining prairie dogs. Even after they resumed work, Parks and Recreation graciously allowed Prairie Dog Pals continued access to the site after hours. With the long daylight hours, we were able to rescue an additional 26 prairie dogs. We are so very appreciative of

Parks and Recreation for their humane consideration, patience, and most of all, their cooperation.

Regrettably, despite many tireless attempts to capture them, at the end of the season there were still at least two prairie dogs on the Landau site. Our hope is that they will survive and will join the thriving colony at the James Joseph Dwyer Memorial Police Substation next door. The introduction of dogs to the site prior to spring should provide added incentive for the move. We tried our level best to capture these prairie dogs; we must remember that we are only human, and we do the best we can. On a positive note, we compliment and bow to this incredible species, and to nature in all her variations.

On another note: During the course of a season, we expect to get a number of compromised prairie dogs due to injury, illness, etc. This includes juveniles with the catchall diagnosis of "failure to thrive." We did capture one (fortunately, only one) injured prairie dog during the dog park construction. His back legs were paralyzed. Sometimes nutrition issues with the mom and/or during the pup's early development can cause this type of paralysis. Although most prairie dogs will manage to avoid bulldozers and shallow digging equipment, we believe that this prairie dog was injured by the earth moving operations. Rodents, in particular, can recover from some spinal injuries. So we waited... Over several weeks this hapless juvenile regained some use of his back legs, but a second veterinary assessment confirmed that any future recovery would likely be limited. Our newest volunteer, Jim T., has fostered this prairie dog because he could not be released to the wild. Jim has named the little guy Ducky.

Below is a mid-project view of the Landau construction site, post-pup season and after grading. This type of habitat loss occurs daily over countless acres in every western state, leaving remaining prairie dog populations in fragments.



*Just to the left of the loader, one of the remaining Landau prairie dogs had to cope with a completely denuded landscape. ❖*

## **The Littlest Rescue: Itsy Bitsy... Or...How Butt Dialing My Cell Phone Saved a Baby Prairie Dog**

By Carrie Biesiot

It's funny how the universe works. Personally, I believe God nudges me to find animals in need. Sometimes I really don't want to be nudged, but I figure I must be needed somewhere, so I go with it. Often times when this happens, I start talking out loud to myself – the “oh, boy,” followed by looking up to Heaven and saying, “Work with me here.” Most times He does, and the rescue is made.

On June 4<sup>th</sup>, I was about to turn in for the night, but felt compelled to take out the trash first. “Oh, boy,” I said to myself. In the dark bushes I saw a cat tossing something in the air. “Great!” I resigned myself to getting a tormented mouse away from the cat. “Drop it!” I yelled like a first rate cop (which I'm not). Surprisingly, the cat dropped whatever “it” was. Squinting in the darkness, I spied a baby sparrow. I brought the tiny bird upstairs, made a soft nest box for her, put the lid on, and went to bed. “Okay, thanks... got it.”

The next morning the sparrow was alive and chirping. “Yippee!” She was too young to fly, and having been caught by a cat, would probably need antibiotics. So, off we went to a wildlife rescue organization. The fastest way would have been to take I-40. I was about to turn east to get to Tramway, but I felt nudged to turn west on Lomas instead. My usual litany kicked. I said to myself, “Okay-y-y, I guess I'm going this way instead.” I wasn't planning on going to the bank, but as I drove down Lomas, I spied an ATM that I had never noticed before. As I pulled up to the ATM, I realized that I didn't have my ATM card with me, so I headed back home. Leaving the house again, I grabbed a bag of carrots, thinking I would toss them out to my foster prairie dog colony on the way. But I passed the colony without throwing them any. “Odd.” I got to Lomas, and stopped to think again which way to go. I told myself to forget the trip to the bank and take the fastest route (turn east) because the bird needed fluids soon. Inexplicably, I turned west -- again!

Driving down Lomas, I passed another prairie dog colony, located next to a daycare. This was a colony I rarely frequented, but I suddenly felt compelled to give them the carrots. I made a u-turn at the APD substation. I didn't see any prairie dog, but as soon as I got out of my car, I spotted movement around some brush about 15' from me. As I approached, a tiny pup darted out and ran to another clump of brush. Something just didn't seem right, so I decided to get a box from my car... just in case.

Just before I reached into my car, I looked back to see the pup scamper over the curb, right onto Lomas! Forget the box! Forget the gloves! I ran to the street. It was like a ball in a pinball machine, going this way and that!

At 52, I didn't realize how many cool basketball-type moves I had. My hand, foot, and eye coordination were worthy of coverage on ESPN. Cars were headed our way, so I had to get it done. My feet went one way; the pup went the other. I turned into some wacko contortionist and made the grab. This is where you normally hear, “Don't try this at home.” Both of us were literally shaking from our fancy moves. I looked up and said, “Thanks for the nudge, and the help -- got it.”

I got back to the car and gently placed the pup in a shoebox lined with a towel. It was such a strange-looking little prairie dog, all head and legs. Then off we went: the bird, the prairie dog, and I. Upon arrival at the wildlife place, I was gathering my precious cargo when my cell phone rang. I pulled it out with the intention of shutting it off, but when I saw who the caller was, I thought, “Oh, happy day!” It was Yvonne B. from Prairie Dog Pals – “What a coincidence!” I shouted out and did a little happy dance in the parking lot. Yvonne said she was returning my call from the night before. I said to her, “Thank God you called!!!” She told me to bring the prairie dog to her.

I raced the bird inside, thanked the wildlife rehabbers, and raced back to the car, anxious to get the little prairie dog to Yvonne. I knew she would know just what to do. When I arrived at Yvonne's, she examined the little pup. It was a girl, and she weighed just 1.8 ounces (or about 40 grams), almost half the appropriate weight for a pup at that time of the season. At that stage, she would not have left the burrow without adult supervision. Yvonne conjectured that a passing car might have killed her mother, leaving the little girl to fend for herself. Luckily, her will to live trumped her dire and dangerous beginnings, and hopefully portends a safe and secure future. Ed decided to call her Itsy Bitsy.

Once the drama was over, I thought about what Yvonne had said about calling me back. I had not called her the night before, but she was indeed returning my call. And this is what is so amazing. I keep my cell phone in the side pocket of my purse. Once in awhile, I “butt-dial” people I don't mean to – you see my purse bumps up on my behind, and tah-dah!! Out of 36 buttons on my cell phone, my behind hit the “Y” key and dialed Yvonne the night before, unbeknownst to me. Yvonne had been out that night and was unable to call me until the next day... at precisely the moment I was reaching for the box with the baby prairie dog in it to bring it to the rehabbers. In my heart of hearts, I knew that this little creature needed Yvonne's special care. Yvonne, thank you for your perfect timing! And thank goodness my behind hit the “Y” key on my phone before I even knew I needed your help.

*Continued on page 4*



June 5, 2011, 10am: Carrie's arrival with Itsy Bitsy launched the rescue protocol -- exam, fluids if required, food, and a treatment cage. Many pups at this stage of development have not yet learned to eat on their own. This is a crucial time when mothers begin the process of weaning their young and demonstrating what is edible. Would this tiny rescue recognize food other than that from her mother?



June 5, 2011, 12 PM: Sadly, independent feeding was not to be... Itsy Bitsy seemed to have no comprehension beyond mother's milk. We resorted to syringe feeding and hope that it was not too late to save her.



At season's end, Itsy Bitsy weighed an impressive 850 grams. ❖

## 112 Endangered Names: Tracking Your Wild Path

By Annabeth Fieck

On Sunday, May 22, 2011, Prairie Dog Pals tabled in Santa Fe at an event hosted by the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance titled, "112 Endangered Names: Tracking Your Wild Path." Justine, a prairie dog advocate from Santa Fe, brought two Gunnison prairie dogs to accompany us. It cannot be over-emphasized how the addition of an outreach prairie dog to any tabling event improves table visitations, reception from the public, and the overall mood of the visitors. As it would have caused undue stress on a prairie dog to transport it all the way from Albuquerque, we were glad to have Justine's two beautiful ambassadors join us.

This event was a tribute to and a demonstration of UNM art teacher Daniel Richmond's unique art forms. His particular approach was not only a display, but also a hands-on learning tool to teach the public about New Mexico's endangered species, from falcons to wolves and 110 others. The art was created by stencil using native soils of New Mexico and spelled out the names of the endangered species in large circles set over the expanse of Museum Hill Plaza.

The event started at 1:00 PM in the afternoon and was free to all. The New Mexico Wilderness Alliance offered face painting (in the style of selected endangered NM species) and wolf-paw potato stencils for the children in attendance. These activities caused the visitors to pause, allowing plenty of time for some to peruse the Prairie Dog Pals' materials and ask questions. The day was perfect; winds were calm, and temperatures were moderate (very important considerations whenever live prairie dogs are present at a tabling event). Prairie Dog Pals' own tabling materials were well received by the public. All in all, it was a successful venture that emphasized the plights of all of New Mexico's endangered species and gave everyone the chance to gaze at one of the most wonderful and vulnerable elements of our fabulous eco-system, the prairie dog. ❖

## Cloudcroft/Evergreen Singleton Rescue

No sooner than Ed U. had stepped off of a plane but that he was pressed into "co-spousal rescue service." Prairie Dog Pals had received a report that there was a prairie dog crouched behind a tree at Evergreen Park off of Cloudcroft St. Ed and Yvonne hurried over to the park. The prairie dog, indeed, was crouched beside a tree, looking bewildered and exhausted. He seemed to be uninjured, but they were not sure, so they approached him quietly from both sides. Ed was able to grab the prairie dog; though once held, he was no longer placid and peaceful. He put up a valiant struggle before being placed in the... where's the kennel?! Yvonne had placed it by the gate, but Ed had walked right by it. Each believed the other had loaded it in the car! With prairie dog in hand, Ed was not about to let it go.

Continued on page 5

*Updates, continued from page 4*

Fortunately, there was a towel handy in the Suburban. Once cocooned in the towel, the prairie dog calmed right down. Ed cradled him like a bird's egg all the way home.

Upon inspection at the staging facility, Ed and Yvonne ascertained that their latest rescue was a robust, healthy male. They surmised that he may have come from the colony at the corner of Cloudcroft and Tramway and that he may have been driven away competing for food. Prairie Dog Pals appreciates the sharp eyes and due diligence of the kind man who contacted us about this prairie dog. He used the rescue as a teachable moment for his daughter, explaining to her how people should always try to help an animal in need... ❖

### **La Libération Petits!**

Prairie Dog Pals makes it a point of protocol to release prairie dog families in sufficient numbers for their safety. Generally, we'll strive for 75-150 prairie dogs over a 1-3 day period. This year we took a decided turn away from this protocol and released a single prairie dog... AND back to where she came from.

Margaret D. had been working to thin the population at the Black Eyed Pea/Olive Garden site. Now, Margaret had been on somewhat of a dry streak when it came to catching prairie dogs, but her squirrel streak was quite hot! Her prairie dog dry spell came to an end that day at the Olive Garden. She caught a healthy female pup. Margaret was so proud!

The next day, as Margaret was preparing to start trapping again, the manager of the Olive Garden came over and expressed his desire to keep the prairie dogs exactly where they were! He explained that they were a joy to the staff and a unique attraction for the clientele. He convinced Margaret of the viability of leaving the prairie dogs in situ, so the next day little Olive Garden girl was returned to her family and friends, making it the smallest release ever!

The Olive Garden evidently benefits from the prairie dog who reside next to their parking lot. They do provide food for the prairie dogs, though it seems to be primarily white bread. Processed foods are as unhealthy for prairie dogs as they are for us. Prairie Dog Pals would like to see the Olive Garden provide better food for its resident colony. ❖

### **A First-Hand Report From A Rescue At Rover**

*Editor's note: This prairie dog fully recovered from her potentially deadly encounter with a car, was reunited with prairie dogs from her colony, and then released.*

I don't know...I guess I just got too close to the "hardway". The next thing I knew, the "whizzzy" was upon me, and all I could do was jump. And then everything went fuzzy, and I saw my whole life before me like a dream.

I saw my mom and my brothers and sisters in our burrow when we were just little pups. Oh, how good my mother's milk tasted! After that, we learned to eat grass, but there wasn't much of it in the place where we lived. Mama had told us how once upon a time there was plenty of grass for all the families to eat. But, the "two-leggers" came and came. They built their own burrows on top of the ground, and for their "whizzies" they built the "hardways" that you can't dig into.

Some of the "two-leggers" were good to us, and some were very bad. There were "foodbringers," like "foodbob" and his wife "foodsheri." We really liked them! They brought us food to make up for the grass that was gone, sweet crunchy things and vegetables that we had never tasted before. My favorite was the "sweetcorn." It was so sweet and tasty that I could not stop eating it. "Foodbob" knew other animals; we could smell a "barky" on him and something else that we didn't recognize. Sometimes he had strange fur on his feet. What kind of sister or brother has long silky fur?

There was another "two-legger" who stole the food that the "foodbringers" brought. We called him "foodthief." He was a mean kind of "two-legger," and you knew that he hated us living things the way he skulked around and barked at the other "two-leggers" that brought us food. Then there was "foam-man." He drove us out of our burrows with wet bubbly stuff. Any of us he could catch, he took away, and we never saw them again. What kind of "two-legger" would take us from our homes?

All of a sudden, I woke up from my dream. I was sore all over, the sky was spinning around, and I was bleeding from my nose and mouth. I couldn't move, but I knew I had to get back to my burrow. My babies needed me to feed them. "Oh, my poor babies"! Slowly, I pulled myself with my front paws, but the pain was so intense. My back legs were stiff, and I couldn't move them. I tried with all my might to get back to my pups, but I just couldn't. I looked up and saw "foodbob." He was trying to grab me. I put my paws up and tried to stop him. "Foodbob" wrapped me in something very soft, but I yelled at him to let me go, so I could take care of my little ones. Soon I was in a cool dark place that smelled like grass. I was moving very fast... was this a "whizzzy"?

When it stopped, "foodbob" and "grayone" were looking down at me and touching me, but I was in too much pain to move. "Grayone" took me to a big room where there were others of my kind. I could hear them and smell them all around me, but I could not see them. They were calling, "Is that you? Is that you?" "Grayone" put me into a big pile of grass, but there were hard sticks all around it so that I couldn't get out. Then he went away. I called for my children, but all I could hear were others calling. Some called for their children like me. Others called, "Where are the 'foodbringers'?" What kind of place was this? I had all the grass I could eat, and every day a "foodbringer" brought nice wet food. I quickly regained my strength, but I still missed my babies... ❖

## ¥ (The Prairie Dog Formerly Known As Prince)

Last fall an animal advocate in Las Cruces arranged for two black-tailed prairie dogs, refugees from the pet trade, to come to safety with Prairie Dog Pals. After having been shuttled from one temporary home to another, they reached Albuquerque in a dreadful state. Their feet were crusted with long festering urine burns from standing in their own urine and feces. Their body tone was poor, their fur smelly and disheveled, and their demeanor reflected the misery they had endured. That they arrived with no medical history and a stale bag of Cheerios was further indication to Prairie Dog Pals that their care had been neglected. The pitiful, dispirited female only awakened each day to pick at her food, and the feisty male spent his time trying to bite his new caregiver at every fresh meal and cleaning of cage and bedding. Instead of expecting to find good foster homes for the pair, Prairie Dog Pals settled in for a long rehabilitation to restore them to health. Both remained nameless for many weeks until Margaret D. dubbed them Prince William and Kate, in recognition of the coincidental royal nuptials.

After several months, William's health improved markedly, but Kate continued to be somewhat frail despite nutritious food and regular care. Jim T., our newest volunteer, offered to provide to Kate a level of care that bordered on round-the-clock hospice, in hope that her health would improve further. For a while, Kate did thrive; she grew more social, became more confident. Unfortunately, she passed away on July 31<sup>st</sup>, 2011, five days after having a stroke. Knowing now that her remaining time was to be so short made it all the more important that she was nurtured and comforted by such a loving caregiver. We can only guess that her earlier years were fraught with uneven care, neglect, and even fear; but all of us are consoled that during her last few months of life she was cherished and loved every single day. Her story is offered in detail in Jim's story about fostering that is included in this issue.

Prince William's personality continued to blossom, and he has become the most popular outreach prairie dog, rewarding curious onlookers with his own friendly curiosity about them. Yet there remained a certain awkwardness about his name. It seemed to be a bad omen to have Prince William "widowed" so young; the situation demanded that his moniker be amended. Unable to settle on a new name, we began to introduce him at tabling events as "the prairie dog formerly known as Prince." Eventually Yvonne decided to call him Prince Pooh Bear, a name she feels reflects his inclusive manner with all species. He spends his days lounging with his friends, other animals who could not be released to the wild: a bunny named Blackberry Bright Eyes, Earl the squirrel, Nemo, a Gunnison prairie dog, and Li-too, another black-tailed prairie dog. ❖

## First (and ONLY) Release To The West Mesa

By Paul Eilers and Ellie Coonce

By late June, the "Inn of the Prairie Dog" (PDP Staging Facility) had become quite full indeed with well over 350 residents. If circumstances are right, we can host as many as 450 prairie dogs at one time, but that is possible only if there are large groups of related prairie dogs that can be housed together (each group in its own tank). In this case, there were too many small families from diverse locations, and we were maxed out. What to do? We took all of the city dogs out to the West Mesa. Our premise was that any prairie dogs that we could capture early on could be reunited with their families already released there. We felt that would be the right thing to do. But nothing is as simple as that. We decided to improve the site during this dry period to help the prairie dogs relocate with the best possible chances.

Over the years, we had observed that the prairie dogs relocated to the West Mesa dispersed very widely across the available acreage. We surmised that it had to do with the sparse food at the relocation site and predation by hawks, coyotes, and badgers. So, we decided to make some amendments at the various release sites to provide additional cover for new tenants.

By this time in June, we had already endured a dry winter, a dry spring, and up to this point in time, no rain... no rain whatsoever. These prairie dogs had suffered from lack of grass at their original colonies, and we worried that poor grass at the relocation site would cause them to forage further afield, exposing them to greater risk of predators. We augured additional starter burrows, put up a silt fence, laid down additional food in seed and water containers, and strategically placed some logs for alternate shelter and predator evasion. With preparations complete, we released 71 prairie dogs on June 27th.

The next day we returned to replenish the food and to check the stability of the cage caps and general site condition. We were shocked to learn that the entire area had been closed due to the risk of fire! We explained to the officials that the prairie dogs were captive in the artificial burrows and had to be released or they would starve to death. They allowed us to go out to the relocation site with the provision that the vehicle remained on the paved road.

Walking to the relocation site was no easy task, especially since we had to carry apples, carrots, and hay. With makeshift slings and packs, we proceeded to hike the dirt path to the prairie dogs. What takes minutes in a vehicle stretched out to hours! We never realized how far it is from the road to the relocation site, maybe 2-3 miles. The walk was grueling and hot, with very cumbersome cargo.

*Continued on page 7*

Updates, continued from page 6

Once there, we removed the cage caps to allow the prairie dogs to escape from confinement, and we left an ample supply of carrots, apples, sunflower seeds, and water. With a much lighter load, the hike back was significantly easier. While exultant from the accomplishment of releasing the prairie dogs, we were extremely happy when the truck appeared on the horizon. We finished our longest, hardest day in quiet exhaustion.



A silt fence was used to encourage the prairie dogs to remain in the release area.



We also created starter burrows and enhanced them with logs to provide shade and afford protection. ❖

### Report From The Commissar!

It has been an expensive year for feeding the prairie dogs! But then with a faltering economy and rocketing prices, we are all in the same boat. “Ah,” for the simpler days of nuclear detente and the cold war! Carrot prices have risen to \$5/10 pounds and apples to \$10/10 pounds; this, however, is nothing compared to

the rise in the price of black oil sunflower seeds! Last year the price was about \$28/50 pounds; this year it has climbed to \$45/50 pounds. To get a cheaper price, we have settled on buying our seeds at Walmart for the time being. As an alternative, we tried “3-in-1” sweet feed, which some of our colleagues swear by, but our results in the staging facility were mixed -- many of the prairie dogs did not care for it. Quantity-wise, once again we easily cleared the one-ton mark for prairie dog mast (nourishment)!

Once again, Frances G. performed daily hostess duty for the prairie dogs. She also took over the administration of most medications and treatments, conducted educational tours, and kept the staging area tidy! Many thanks, Frances! ❖

*Editor's note: One of the joys our work with prairie dogs is the chance to meet with like-minded people who often reinvigorate our momentum. Mina Carnicom is the enthusiastic organizer for Wildlife West's two-day Wildlife Fair, a very popular event in which Prairie Dog Pals participates each year. We were lucky to catch her recent "Letter to the Editor," printed on August 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2011, in the Albuquerque Journal. Her heartfelt letter extolled the care of ALL wildlife – no matter how small. It is reprinted below.*

### Even a Bug's Life Precious, Rosemond

I WAS SADDENED by the response of John Rosemond in his Aug. 11 column in the Albuquerque Journal to the indiscriminate killing of insects. To the best of our knowledge, all life on Earth today has a direct, unbroken ancestral link extending back to the original bit of life formed eons ago. We are all related and, as a part of an unbroken chain, a survivor, and worthy of respect. So if it isn't a threat and you don't need to eat it, let it be! No life should ever be taken without a good reason. Life comes but once to every organism, and is precious to its owner.



**MINA L. CARNICOM**  
Sandia Park

### What good are prairie dogs?

Many people ask what good are prairie dogs?

There is an old Navajo warning that, if you kill off the prairie dogs there will be no one to cry for rain.

Bill Mollison, the father of permaculture, notes in response that: Amused scientists, knowing that there was no conceivable relationship between prairie dogs and rain, recommended the extermination of all burrowing animals in some desert areas planted to rangelands in the 1950s... in order to protect the roots of sparse desert grasses. Today the area (not far from Chilchinbito, Arizona) has become a virtual wasteland. Fierce run-off, soil compaction, and lack of fresh seedbed have carried the grasses away.

## Hermosa

Ellie C. answered a call with Ed U. The homeowner reported that they had heard “yipping” coming from under their steps. Unfortunately, the stairs, while wooden and moveable, were constructed in cells and dovetailed with cinderblocks below, providing a perfect retreat for a prairie dog. They tried the rousting technique with Ellie manning the net, but the prairie dog knew the lay of the land and merely moved from one section of the stairs to another. After several fruitless tries, they had to resort to lifting the stairs. Unfortunately, in the process, the prairie dog scooted past Ellie into a recently dug burrow. Fortunately, the owner’s dog had enlarged the burrow, which permitted Ed to reach in and capture the reluctant prairie dog.

We wondered, “Where did this prairie dog come from?” The best bet is Kirtland AFB. So much for social responsibility and being a good neighbor to the surrounding community! They continuously poison and harass, driving the resident prairie dogs into the adjoining neighborhoods. ❖

## Turquoise Trails Campground

By Paul Eilers

Turquoise Trail Campground is a scenic spot located in the Sandia Mountains. In addition to the beautiful landscape, guests there were greeted by the sight of cute little prairie dogs scurrying about their business. The hosts of the campground work hard to provide a well-kept campground, and they welcomed the prairie dogs that lived on their land. Horses are also welcome, and Turquoise Trails offers boarding areas for travelers/campers who are transporting horses.

A horse boarding facility isn't a common amenity at campgrounds, and therefore it's quite a selling point for Turquoise Trail. The mere presence of prairie dogs, though, would deter customers hoping to board horses. The debate about horses and prairie dogs coexisting is longstanding and undoubtedly will continue. Facts become mostly irrelevant when one fears for their pet's wellbeing and believes it may become seriously injured if it steps or trips in a prairie dog burrow. So, although the prairie dogs offered much enjoyment and provided a rather unique wildlife experience for many campers, the loss of potential income for the campground during these times was too hard to absorb.

The owners of Turquoise Trail Campground asked Prairie Dog Pals to humanely relocate their beloved prairie dogs. Using a combination of trapping and flushing, we removed 65 prairie dogs from the horse paddock and surrounding areas. The hosts and their camper guests missed the prairie dogs immediately; everyone had greatly enjoyed watching their playful antics. Considering the impact of their absence, it begs the question: how do we allow prairie dogs to coexist, teach, and interact with us while posing no threat, whether real or imagined, to others, including us. ❖

## Prairie Dogging Along I-40

I've been working on the freeway all the live-long day... or however the song goes. With the cooperation of the New Mexico Department of Transportation, Prairie Dog Pals continued our efforts to thin the population of prairie dogs along the on- and off-ramps of I-40. They granted us a permit to work alongside the ramps between Tramway and Wyoming. Our survey determined that there are no longer prairie dogs at the Wyoming ramps or on the north side of the Juan Tabo interchange. There are colonies at Tramway, Eubank, and the south side ramps at Juan Tabo.

These prairie dogs have been trapped and flushed before, and thus are accustomed to our ways. Over numerous visits to these sites, we captured 90 prairie dogs. One capture of which we are particularly proud is that of a prairie dog from the Eubank eastbound on-ramp area. There were about 10 burrows there, none of which looked particularly active. We flushed the burrows, more out of resignation than hope of capturing anything. We were quite surprised when out of one burrow came a robust, healthy male. Our theory is that these were his bachelor digs and that he would meander over to the eastbound off-ramp when he wanted company. He was not a happy camper!

At the end of the day, or in this case, the length of our permit, there are still prairie dogs along the ramps from Eubank to Tramway. Although our goal had been simply to thin the populations, it would certainly be nice if we could clear these areas someday. For a prairie dog, freeway living is hard. Many lose their lives on the on/off-ramps. Grass in these areas varies from sparse to practically non-existent; some areas have even been covered with wood chips. Removing the prairie dogs would eliminate the need to provide supplemental feeding in these areas. ❖

## Skunked!

By Ellie Coonce

There were no clues to suggest that this burrow would be different from any other. Paul E. and I sat, watching the foam stream down the burrow as we worked on a lot adjacent to the East Gate Church. Before the foam reached the top, a pair of animals came scrambling out. There was a brief moment of confusion as we saw a black and white head emerge from the burrow, but we quickly realized what the creature was. Both of us sprang back 20 feet as Paul exclaimed, “SKUNK!” The wet skunk emerged from the burrow, followed closely by her bewildered baby. The momma looked around, luckily decided we were not a threat, and led her baby back into the burrow. Needless to say, we left that burrow alone for the remainder of the summer. ❖

## Ellie Goes To College!!

By Ellie Coonce

I was thirteen when I began working regularly with Prairie Dog Pals. As I grew, so did my working hours and responsibilities. Prairie Dog Pals enriched my life in ways I can't describe and was a huge contributing factor in my choice to pursue a career in wildlife conservation.

While I was researching colleges, I stumbled across the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry (SUNY-ESF) in Syracuse, New York. I fell in love with the small student population, the beautiful campus, 25,000 acres of wilderness land for student fieldwork (both in the Adirondack Mountains and on an island in Lake Ontario), and an incredible range of degree programs all within the umbrella of environmental science. Armed with an essay detailing my work with Prairie Dog Pals, I applied and was accepted with a great scholarship package that made the offer hard to resist. It was obvious from my application that I have a huge amount of passion for what I do, and that is exactly what ESF looks for, lucky for me.

My experience with Prairie Dog Pals made college possible for me, and I cannot adequately express my gratitude towards this organization and the people in it. After five summers of rescue and relocation with Prairie Dog Pals, it's tough to say goodbye. Albuquerque is my home, and I know I will miss the prairie dogs as much as the people. However, I am incredibly excited to begin my life on my own. I will be majoring in Conservation Biology and plan to dedicate my life to the plight of animals all around the globe. Thank you to Prairie Dog Pals for allowing me to find my path, for believing in me, and for giving me the opportunity to save over 6,000 prairie dogs over the course of five summers! I will never forget what this organization did for me in my teen years. Prairie Dog Pals has left a permanent mark on my heart (and on my ankle).



Ellie's tat! ❖

## Skunked -- Part Deux

Ed U. had completed his sweep of the north side of I-40 between Tramway and Wyoming when the monsoon season hit. At the first opportunity of clear skies, he started working his way eastward. The burrows had drained much of the runoff into the ground, as burrows are wont to do. (This is one of the reasons prairie dogs are a keystone species and an essential part of the prairie ecosystem.) It was early in the day; the prairie dogs hadn't bothered to come topside yet. Ed flushed the burrows anyway in hopes of catching some of the early risers. When he saw the foam pulsing, he knew he was finally getting some action. To those of us who have experienced the thrill of flushing and know the lore of "bubble-ology," pulsing foam means that a prairie dog is on its way up. The first thing Ed saw, though, was a cute black and white cat-like face. Immediately he knew he'd roused a skunk. They parted ways both hastily and cautiously, she to an adjoining burrow and he far, far away! ❖

## The Prairie Dogs' Newest Pal

By Ray Watt

The newest Sunflower Market at the corner of Montgomery and Juan Tabo has been a great place for those in the Northeast Heights to find fresh vegetables, organic items, and bulk foods. Now there is another great reason to shop at Sunflower: they have become a "prairie dog pal." Our thanks go out to Produce Manager Robin Romero, who saw that vegetable cuttings, outer leaves, and unsellable or damaged fruit and vegetables could either go into a dumpster or help feed hungry prairie dogs. Thankfully, she chose the latter and contacted Prairie Dog Pals with the idea of making all this otherwise unusable food available to us.

Our feeding coordinator, Graziella S., then contacted a number of feeders to arrange pickups of this material. Currently, we have scheduled pickups for Tuesday through Saturday. Having a reliable food source for our feeders makes things so much easier, and it means that many more animals will survive the lean summer months here in Albuquerque.

It is astonishing how much food is wasted in the United States every year. According to a 1997 U.S. Agriculture Economics Research Service report on food waste, nearly 100 billion pounds of food was wasted by consumers, retailers, and food service establishments in 1995. This amounts to a quarter of the entire food supply and does not take into account produce that is un-harvested, unsold, or otherwise left to rot in the fields. Although the data in report was not recently compiled, there is little evidence that this situation has improved significantly. This is a moral issue, as well as an environmental one, and we at Prairie Dog Pals can only do our small part. Thanks, Sunflower Market, for your unique contribution and for helping out our prairie dogs!

*Continued on page 10*

Updates, continued from page 9



*Ella W. distributes food to the prairie dogs at Los Colinas.*

### **Prairie Dog Pals Has An Intern!**

For the past few years Prairie Dog Pals has had a great relationship with the New Mexico Aging and Long-Term Services Department. At their invitation we have made presentations at their annual conferences. This year marked a new level of collaboration, with great benefits all around. Through a federally funded program, the department supplies paid interns to non-profit organizations willing to provide long-term training and supervision that prepares the intern to return to the workforce. The goal of this program is to provide the unemployed with the broad abilities needed for the tough business environment we all may face as a nation for many years to come.

Our new intern is Sherry P., a former teacher, who already possesses a range of skills. Sherry will be working with Prairie Dog Pals indefinitely as we train her in office administration, data base management, record keeping, outreach presentation, and event planning. To that end, we have been interspersing a variety of tasks with casual presentations designed to teach her all about the life and lore of the prairie dog. Indeed, we had a laugh at our mutual expense that she will one day be able to list “worked with rodents” on her resume. We are so very fortunate to have connected with such a conscientious, motivated, mature employee. Please do take time to meet her during weekdays, especially if you can contribute to her growing repertoire of all things prairie dog. ❖

### **Hayes Middle School**

By Paul Eilers

Do you know Hayes? I know Hayes... I know Hayes very well! Of all the Albuquerque city sites, it is one of our most difficult. Seems like every year, we've almost got it cleared, but in the spring we find it miraculously repopulated. It is a place of conflicting outlooks.

The prairie dogs **really** want to stay there. After all, it is their ancestral turf, with an extensively developed network of burrows, lush green grass, and few predators. Understandably, the administration does not want them there, as it is a school with a multi-use athletic field frequented by students and the general public. Prairie dog burrows are just not compatible with an active sports field.

So, although Hayes is a testament to prairie dog resilience and capture evasion, the fact remains that relocation needs to succeed -- not only for the survival of the prairie dogs on the site, but also to show that capture and relocation is possible, practical, and proactive. Despite numerous successes at other sites and cities, any failure can be held as an example of why lethal control should be implemented.

The pre-pup season of 2011 was an important operation at Hayes. The prairie dogs had recently emerged from hibernation and were a little forgetful of the previous year's chase by the flushing crew. Events went extremely well; we captured and relocated most of the prairie dogs, including many females of breeding age. After the pup season break, we found that only two families of pups had been born on the field, and we easily captured and relocated these families. The Hayes site is very green now. Unfortunately, at the end of the 2011, three prairie dogs remained; thus, the struggle at Hayes continues. ❖

### **Moriarty High School**

Moriarty High School called Prairie Dog Pals when they realized an absolute catastrophe had occurred -- some of the prairie dogs that had previously resided on the baseball field had migrated onto the adjacent football field! Sacrilege! This represented the last straw in their tolerance of the prairie dogs; the small colony that had for years been living on the adjacent dirt lot and baseball field now had to go! Paul E. and Ellie C. jumped into action. After several visits, the field is once again safe for play. ❖

### **Albuquerque City Sites**

By Paul Eilers

We have relocated a lot of prairie dogs from Albuquerque and the surrounding area. Every year there are fewer sites and fewer prairie dogs. I'm not sure how right it is, but I do believe if we do not relocate prairie dogs, lethal measures will be taken. Once lethal controls are implemented, they become easier to rationalize, and thus a common approach. It is my hope that by relocating prairie dogs from unacceptable areas, such as athletic fields, xeriscaped areas, and parks, we can reach a point where remaining colonies can be managed. Embracing a management plan, as opposed to a removal plan, would enable prairie dogs to remain in certain areas to support survival of the species, promote public appreciation, and emphasize the need for co-existence. Unfortunately, with so many compelling, conflicting views, these plans are not easy to develop... but I believe it can be done. ❖

## **Walgreens Colony at Tramway/Indian School**

By Paul Eilers

Urban sites are a conundrum. To feed or not to feed -- that is the question! Certainly if there is a lack of vegetation on a site, the resident prairie dogs will be dependent on dedicated feeders to provide most of their sustenance. Sometimes though, since urban colonies do not have many predators, a colony that is well fed can develop a serious density problem. This was the case at the Walgreens on Tramway and Indian School, where many sympathetic and caring individuals bring food.

When Prairie Dog Pals arrived to help manage the Walgreens' colony, there was a significant density problem. The high density of the prairie dog population and lack of any native grasses made this colony ideal for thinning. We swept in with traps and removed 74 prairie dogs. This is a positive step for the prairie dogs that remain -- they are not nearly as densely crowded as they were before, and this greatly reduces the competition for food.

Sometimes, however, the folks who provide food for the prairie dogs are upset when "THEIR" prairie dogs are relocated. We understand... these folks visit frequently, get to know the individual prairie dogs, and watch the families as they grow and play. Even these folks were pleased that the area was being managed to reduce the density.

Thanks to the many compassionate people who deliver food, the Walgreens colony will continue to exist. This is a good thing considering prairie dog habitat is down 97% throughout their range. The Walgreens prairie dogs are very socialized due to their dependence on humans. Because of this, it is a wonderful place to experience prairie dogs and introduce people to the species. The prairie dog will often approach people, sometimes getting very close, to see what they have to offer. Of course, it's not an ideal situation, but it's certainly not the worst. As long as it's managed with care and good biological protocols, the Walgreens colony can continue as a showcase for humans and wildlife co-existing in an urban environment. ❖

## **East Gate Church Or... A Brand New Perspective In A Brand New Year**

On a number of occasions over the years, Prairie Dog Pals has been pressured by other non-profit organizations (particularly churches) to provide our services for free. Our little non-profit organization is often held hostage by entities claiming poverty for the sake of their bottom line. It has happened so often that we wryly state that a new genre of non-profits needs to be identified, that of "de-funded"... those non-profit organizations that have been bankrupted by endless charitable work.

One of these encounters occurred a couple of years ago when the East Gate Church wanted us to clear the prairie dogs from a large parcel of land. With no hint of negotiation or compromise, the intolerant pastor prodded Prairie Dog Pals to provide this service gratis. His oily-voiced maintenance super nagged and whined incessantly for this entitlement, promising to destroy the prairie dogs if we didn't remove them. There was even a city official urging us to "help them out," for free, of course. We gamely spun the entire situation, as in, "Let's do this for the sake of the hapless prairie dogs who are under threat through no fault of their own." Still, it left a bitter taste...

Thus, you can imagine our hesitation to take another call from the East Gate Church. With some apprehension, we DID take their call, and we heard an amazing story unfold. The church had been split in half by discord from within. The pastor had departed with his troll-ish minion, but left the church with crushing debts. Nevertheless, the woman on the other end of the line spoke gently of how she remembered that we had made the best of a bad situation and rescued the prairie dogs for their own sake and safety.

Despite, the church's ongoing financial struggle, they were quite sincerely requesting an estimate for follow-up rescue of the stragglers that had remained and reproduced. In every case, Prairie Dog Pals endeavors to shave our expenses to offer the most economical service for all of our clients. In this case, we struggled further to find a number that would not exceed their hard won gathering of funds. Today, Prairie Dog Pals has a wonderful ally in Rhonda M. She and her husband visited the staging facility and gave a hopeful, soulful sendoff to the prairie dogs rescued from East Gate. Prairie Dog Pals keeps a watchful eye on the site (for everyone's sake) and a warm spot in our hearts for our newest friends. ❖

## **Patch**

By Frances Gauthier

All prairie dogs processed in at the staging facility receive a health inspection. One of the rescues who came in from the East Gate Church site was in absolutely dreadful condition. Paul E. and Yvonne B. surmised that he may have been caught by but escaped from a dog (canine). He had a puncture wound on the side of his head and a ram's horn tooth (see explanation below), probably due to damage to his jaw from the bite. He was dangerously malnourished and was losing his fur. His coat was so patchy that I named him Patch.

*Continued on page 12*

*Updates, continued from page 11*

Prairie dogs' incisor teeth grow continuously. They use their incisors to snip the grass they eat into smaller more digestible portions. Silicon in the grass wears down the enamel, and thus keeps their incisors trimmed nicely. If their top and bottom incisors do not match up with each other, a tooth can continue to grow unchecked. It grows in a curved fashion, so it begins to look like a ram's horn. This is a serious condition for a prairie dog; it can prevent them from eating, and cause severe malnutrition. If that does not kill them first, the tooth will eventually grow back into their head.

Patch needed some serious treatment, and it was definitely a group effort. Paul and Yvonne worked together to trim Patch's ram's horn tooth, and cleaned his wound with hydrogen peroxide. Then it was up to me to put some groceries on this guy, and fast. I, and sometimes Ed U. tended Patch's wound every day, but it wouldn't close up and continued to ooze. We tried oral antibiotics, but still the wound oozed. Flies will often lay their eggs in an open wound of a mammal, and the resulting larvae (maggots) will feed on the flesh surrounding the wound. If Patch's wound did not close, we would not be able to release him to the wild.

I brought Patch to see Prairie Dog Pals' trusted vet, Dr. Daniel Levenson at Southwest Veterinary Medical Center in Corrales. Dr. Levenson determined that Patch had indeed incurred injury to his jaw, but said that if he could eat and maintain a good weight, he could be released to the wild. Patch was eating well and steadily gaining weight, but there was still the issue of the oozing wound. Dr. Levenson prescribed another round of oral antibiotics (a different type). The oozing slowed, but the wound still did not close. Yvonne B. had the idea to use a topical herb supplement, called Yunnan Baiyao, which she had learned about from her Oriental Medicine veterinarian; the Chinese use it to help wounds heal. Success at last! -- Patch's wound finally closed.

After many weeks of onerous treatments, Patch was released to the Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge in mid-September. He is lucky to be alive and blessed to have a new home on a wide-open prairie. His fur isn't patchy anymore, but he bears one heck of a scar from his arduous experience. Maybe his new compadres will call him Scarface. At the very least, they will know that he is one tough cookie. ❖

### **Dies Horribilis**

By Frances Gauthier

There was one day this summer that stood out as a particularly bad day (*dies horribilis*). I had just finished feeding all the prairie dogs in the staging facility when

Yvonne B. informed me that two different animal control officers were in route, each with a severely injured animal.

First came Officer Mark Tafoya, who brought us a frantic little squirrel trapped inside a torture chamber -- someone's bright idea for a homemade trap. The trap was a wood frame box with sides made of expanded metal mesh. This material is made from a sheet of metal uniformly slit and stretched, forming diamond-shaped openings in the sheet. The edges of the diamond-shaped openings are sharp. One side of the box was hinged, but the only opening through which the squirrel could have entered was a tube, also made of the metal mesh, that was wide on the outside and narrowed as it entered the box.

The squirrel had squeezed through the tube to get into the box and eat the bait, but it could not get out. Once it realized it was trapped, this poor little squirrel had pushed against every square inch of the inside of this trap in a desperate attempt to free itself. In the process, it had literally scraped the nose right off its face. The sight was so horrific that it nearly brought Yvonne and me to tears. The inside of the box was covered in blood, as was the squirrel's fur. There was a flap of tissue hanging from what was left of the squirrel's nose, and we could see the exposed cartilage. Officer Tafoya and Yvonne transferred the terrified squirrel to a cage. It was too agitated for us to determine the sex.



*The squirrel (photographed the day after he came in)*

No sooner had Officer Tafoya left, than Corporal W. McKay arrived with a young male prairie dog who was in dire straits. The pup had been attacked by a dog and driven from his colony into the courtyard of a lady's house. The kind woman put out some lettuce for the injured pup and kept a watchful eye on him over the weekend while she tried to reach Prairie Dog Pals for help. When Corporal McKay arrived with the pup, it was in very serious condition.

*Continued on page 13*

Updates, continued from page 12

Yvonne immediately transferred the pup to a treatment cage with a “snuggle safe” (a microwave-able disk that keeps a steady temperature for 12 hours). All his bite wounds appeared closed and were not oozing, so she concentrated on rehydrating him by administering drops of puppy milk replacement formula with a syringe. She also gave him a dose of oral antibiotic. During the entire time Yvonne was treating him, the little prairie dog’s breathing was labored, and he never opened his eyes. Because he still had the strength to swallow, she held out hope that he might survive.

Because the two injured animals arrived within minutes of each other, Yvonne and I had not had a chance to treat the squirrel. We concentrated on the prairie dog because he was in worse shape, but we knew the squirrel must be in terrible pain. Because treating the squirrel was a two-person job, we made the difficult decision to leave the ailing pup alone for a few minutes while we tended to the squirrel.

Squirrels are generally more skittish than prairie dogs. Sticking your hand in the cage of a squirrel for any reason results in... well, what looks like a squirrel in a blender. The danger is that, in its mad dash around the cage, the squirrel might dart right out the cage door. Since this squirrel was particularly agitated, we had to use extreme caution. It gave us a chance to try out something I had thought of for this very purpose -- a plastic coated wire sink guard. Yvonne held it in front of the cage door and put her arm through the hole that normally accommodates the drain. There was no extra space through which the squirrel could escape. While Yvonne gently held the squirrel down, I dripped a liquid antiseptic onto the squirrel’s nose, and then inserted a Q-tip through the cage bars to apply an analgesic gel. We could tell it was working because the squirrel let out this huge sigh as the pain subsided.

Sadly, in the short time that it took for Yvonne and I to treat the squirrel, the little prairie dog had died. Over time, the squirrel’s injury healed, but it was left with sort of a snub nose. It was released into the yard of a member of Prairie Dog Pals, who throws food out for it everyday. We know it has made their yard its home because they see the little snub-nosed squirrel from time to time. Prairie Dog Pals cannot save every injured animal that comes to us, but we will always try our hardest to do so. We are grateful for the assistance of dedicated animal control officers and the kind citizens who reach out on behalf of these animals. ❖

“Our task must be to free ourselves by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature and its beauty.”

*Albert Einstein, American Physicist*



*Emancipation for the little snub-nosed squirrel*

### Colorado

Once again Prairie Dog Pals, under the stewardship of Paul E., partnered with the Colorado Springs Utility Company to get prairie dogs out of harm’s way. This year they will be moved from a pipeline right of way to a conservation easement. The encouraging thing about this particular project is that the landowner insisted that the prairie dogs be humanely relocated as a condition of the easement! Kudos to him! ❖

### Wildlife West

For several years we have been discussing the possibility of relocating prairie dogs to the Wildlife West Nature Park in Edgewood. The park is a sanctuary for compromised wildlife that cannot be rehabilitated and released back into the wild. There had been a small colony there years ago, but it died out due to unknown reasons. The project at Moriarity High School provided us with excellent local stock to provide the park with a small colony of prairie dogs. So Paul E. and Ellie C. did a little site prep, using an auger to prepare the existing burrows for their new occupants. The release went well, and the colony seems to have adapted to their new digs.



*Ellie releases a Moriarity prairie dog at Wildlife West ❖*

# Prairie Dog Fostering: The Challenges and Rewards

By James E. Trever

*Editor's note: Since Jim T. arrived in Albuquerque and, specifically to Prairie Dog Pals, he has been a real trooper! He's helped with outreach, trapping, and flushing (and has gotten bitten a lot in the process!). The chance to help compromised prairie dogs in need rekindled his interest in fostering rescues as well. Here's his story.*

I recently moved from New Bern, North Carolina, where I had been a part time wildlife rehabber (with a state permit) for 14 years. There I primarily worked with orphaned gray squirrels and flying squirrels two seasons a year. But during the spring and summer of 1998, I was shocked to learn that black-tailed prairie dogs were being sold as pets to local clientele after being literally sucked out of their burrows into a vacuum truck out west. I adopted four males, and later an older, sick female, making a new family of five of these refugees from the pet trade. Pepper, as the lone female was called, had been raised on cheese puffs as her favorite food. When she died of lymphosarcoma cancer a year later, I was not surprised.



*Grown up pet shop prairie dog rescues at Christmas in North Carolina*

It should be said at the outset that the goal of rehabbing is to be able to release animals back to the wild. It is only as a last resort that we choose to foster wildlife! Besides us, prairie dogs are among the most gregarious of animals on the planet. They do not belong in pet stores, especially not in extremely humid eastern North Carolina where they are not indigenous (their burrows would be below the water table if they were). Many of these "pets" in North Carolina eventually died from upper respiratory infections, to which I attribute excessive humidity as a key factor.

The upside to this story is that raising and living with prairie dogs is a truly wonderful experience. To love and be loved by a prairie dog is very special and rewarding. Each prairie dog I have observed has or had a distinctly different personality. Still, prairie dogs are not a domesticated species, and as such do not make suitable pets. Even after prolonged contact with a fostered prairie dog, one can experience unexpected and sometimes severe bites! It can be said that no one lives with prairie dogs without the scars to prove it!

My experience with prairie dogs led me to contact Prairie Dog Pals within my first two weeks after arriving in New Mexico. I could actually do something to make a difference in the lives of the local Gunnison prairie dogs and, as it turns out, two black-tailed rescues as well. Since joining Prairie Dog Pals this year, I have volunteered with several relocations, rescues (flushing), outreach events, and foster care. In addition, I have prepared and given a Prairie Dog Pals' presentation, helped prepare and release a call to action alert, and helped process prairie dogs for intake into the staging facility and for release to relocation sites. Indeed, I have yet to unpack!

Dedication to wildlife is both precious and time consuming. Every minute engaged is worth it... And yes, it does help to be retired! The first foster I took in this spring was Katie, a black-tailed prairie dog rescued from neglect within the pet trade. Katie was the exception in fostering wildlife; we were able to bond very quickly, literally within hours of meeting over just a 2-day period at Prairie Dog Pals headquarters. Due to my move, it was not until April 24, 2011, that I could bring Katie home. During the preceding month, Katie had begun to lose some weight and had become a bit bony -- loose in her skin. By taking in Katie, I was able to devote special attention to her diet. It helped that she no longer had to compete for food with her previous dominating cage mate, Prince William. I eventually settled on a protocol of Oxbow Healthy Handfuls with plant-based protein for her regular diet. She gained back 130 grams over the next three months. Once she did not have to compete with other prairie dogs in the communal space at Prairie Dog Pals headquarters, Katie became an exceptionally cuddly prairie dog, very much like Pepper, the older female I had fostered in North Carolina. Katie's confidence grew as her sense of safety and comfort was further enhanced.



*Katie, after sharing a nap with Jim*

*Continued on page 15*

Because prairie dogs are such social animals, it is generally beneficial for one to have a cage mate. When I took in Katie, Yvonne suggested that Flower might make a better companion for Katie than Prince William had. And certainly if Katie were happier, it might stimulate her desire to eat. Prairie Dog Pals had fostered Flower for several years as a result of a hawk injury she had suffered to her right forelimb. Despite Prairie Dog Pals' best efforts, it was ultimately determined that the leg could not be saved, and it was amputated. Due to the injury, long-term medical treatment with daily cleansing and medicine, surgery, and then life as an amputee, Flower was never very relaxed around humans or very many other animals. It was agreed that I take her in, thus changing the equation and hopefully reducing her fears over time.

Flower is more typical of the fostering experience, in that one quickly grows to love them, but the prairie dog may not reciprocate any time soon, if ever. Prairie dogs have long memories of whatever trauma led them to be fostered in the first place. Fostering is often a one-way relationship, sometimes for considerable time. It is important not to take a prairie dog's behavior personally. Analyzing a prairie dog's behavior in human terms and expectations (called "anthropomorphizing") can cause considerable frustration. As smart as prairie dogs are, one cannot expect them to show appreciation, especially in human terms. Because of their social nature, one may gain their trust and even affection with much patience and perseverance. This is what makes fostering so rewarding.



*Flower in her sand-bath*

Flower has come a long way since the end of May. She is responsive and jump-yips frequently (suggesting she considers me family). She allows me to handle her much of the time, but she does not want to be held. Her body language sometimes suggests that she is only tolerating any contact at all.

On July 27, 2011, Katie suffered a stroke and passed away five days later. Needless to say, I was very devastated. We considered that she might have been much older than her former cage-mate, Prince William, maybe even 8 to 10 years old. Advanced age could have explained her gradual weight loss before my fostering her. Gaining her weight back may have been too much for her system, resulting in the stroke. Regardless, her last months were very special, and she went peacefully, knowing she was very loved. I felt just as loved. As difficult as it was to do, I froze Katie's body and offered it to a raptor rehabber so that another species may live.

My fourth foster is Missy, an underweight juvenile Gunnison, who was captured this season. I am working to assimilate her with Flower. In trying to provide a communal space for them to explore and greet each other without territorial issues, there can be many a misstep. The first time that I let Flower out she squeezed under a two-inch opening below my dresser. From that I learned just how wily and flexible prairie dogs can be! This is just an example of the types of frustration with which a foster custodian may have to deal.

My latest foster is Ducky, a juvenile Gunnison who was kept from joining his family at the release site because of a spinal cord injury that partially paralyzed both his hind limbs. Rodents are sometimes capable of healing spinal cord injuries, and he has improved somewhat since being rescued. Hopefully this trend will continue.

Eventually, I hope to assimilate Flower, Missy, and Ducky together in a much-expanded habitat. When one is a wildlife rehabber, every day is a learning experience. It is the nature of the business. Despite the challenges, few endeavors are more rewarding than giving a prairie dog (or other animal) a second chance at life.



*Foster prairie dog Missy peering through the bars of her temporary quarters*



# Prairie Dogs in the News

*Editor's note: The following are excerpts from articles that appear on the internet. To read the full articles, go to the URLs listed.*

## The Humane Way to Manage Prairie Dogs

The spot that a colony of Arizona prairie dogs picked for their home was worse than bad; it was positively perilous. They were living beneath a rifle range at the Camp Navajo National Guard Training Site outside Flagstaff. For their own safety, the prairie dogs had to go. Instead of poisoning the animals, “a cruel and too-frequent solution” wildlife biologist Janet Lynn at Camp Navajo asked The HSUS for help. Experts from The HSUS have begun training volunteers and professional wildlife biologists on the latest techniques to relocate prairie dogs humanely. (The slideshow above shows some of these techniques used in Thunder Basin National Grassland). The work is critical because the ranks of prairie dogs have plummeted by 95 percent after decades of persecution, habitat loss, and capture for the pet trade. Endangered black-footed ferrets, owls, hawks, foxes, and about 200 other species depend on prairie dogs and their habitat. Prairie dogs now occupy just two to eight percent of their historic range, and without serious conservation efforts, they may soon disappear. It's time for a new approach to managing these ecologically critical creatures.

Read more:

[http://www.humanesociety.org/news/news/2011/07/prairie\\_dog\\_training\\_072111.html#id=album-103&num=content-1971](http://www.humanesociety.org/news/news/2011/07/prairie_dog_training_072111.html#id=album-103&num=content-1971) ❖

## Conservationists Partner With Colorado Town to Save Prairie Dogs

Tuesday, the Town Council of Telluride, Colorado, stepped into the enlightened position of approving protection for the Gunnison's species of prairie dogs that has occupied an area called the Valley Floor for years. Nicole Rosmarino, Wildlife Director for WildEarth Guardians, an organization that has worked with Telluride for several months to negotiate the agreement wrote: Instead of resolving potential conflicts with human activities by killing prairie dogs, Telluride's prairie dogs will be allowed to roam the Valley Floor, with only natural predators to worry about. The Valley Floor is home to several colonies of prairie dogs and we have been working with Town staff and the San Miguel Conservation Foundation on a prairie dog coexistence plan.

Read more:

<http://www.examiner.com/environmental-policy-in-national/conservationists-partner-with-colorado-town-to-save-prairie-dogs> ❖

## Golfing Prairie Dog

The furry black-tailed prairie dog that spent a month as a curious conversation piece at Bobby Jones Golf Club, and became a national media darling along the way, is getting a new home. Nicknamed "Putter," this prairie dog is being safely relocated this week. Putter first popped out of a burrow he dug along the first fairway of the British Course in early June. The friendly critter was assumed to be someone's pet that got loose or was intentionally set free.

Read more:

<http://everythinggolf.blogs.heraldtribune.com/11496/famous-sarasota-prairie-dog-getting-new-home/> ❖

## EPA Cancels Rozol Prairie Dog Bait

As of August 8, 2011, Rozol Prairie Dog Bait (EPA Reg. No 7173-286) cannot be sold or used in South Dakota, North Dakota, Montana, and New Mexico. Unopened containers must be returned to the suppliers for return to Liphatech...

*Editor's Note: WOO HOO! Now, that's good news!*

Read more:

[http://rapidcityjournal.com/hotspotsstar/epa-cancels-rozol-prairie-dog-bait/article\\_790882f8-c75e-11e0-bef0-001cc4c002e0.html](http://rapidcityjournal.com/hotspotsstar/epa-cancels-rozol-prairie-dog-bait/article_790882f8-c75e-11e0-bef0-001cc4c002e0.html) ❖

## Sunport Update

The Airport Animal Friends committee (AAF) and many concerned citizens were unable to convince administrators at the Albuquerque International Sunport to forgo lethal wildlife control measures. Poison was put down prairie dog burrows, and then the holes filled with newspaper and dirt. The type of poison used causes a slow and painful death due to massive internal bleeding.

It is likely that some prairie dogs were able to avoid the poison and survive. Sunport officials estimate that there may be as many as 2,000 to 3,000 prairie dogs left (out of 18,000). No matter how many prairie dogs survive, Sunport officials plan to persist with both lethal and non-lethal measures. The AAF committee continues to communicate with the Sunport Administration, tirelessly lobbying for a return to reason and compassion. An anonymous donor has made a generous offer to offset costs of humane relocation, but the Sunport, remains firm in their pursuit of lethal control. ❖

“The thinking (person) must oppose all cruel customs no matter how deeply rooted in tradition and surrounded by a halo. When we have a choice, we must avoid bringing torment and injury into the life of another. “

*Albert Schweitzer, French Philosopher*

# Annual Garage Sale

By Raymond Watt

Prairie Dog Pals held its annual garage sale on May 27<sup>th</sup>, and once again it was a rousing success. We raised nearly \$750, and hopefully, made a few converts to the side of protecting prairie dogs. Many people donated special and unique items. The tremendous variety and quality of donations really brought out the shoppers. Several people who had noticed our listing on Craigslist were there well before the official opening at 8 AM.

From books to bikes and TV sets and electronics to household items, we had it all -- even the kitchen sink -- no kidding! To those of you who donated -- many, many thanks! We have tax-deductible donation forms available if you want to take advantage of this privilege. Thanks, also, to the volunteers who braved the heat, the crowds, and the occasional persistent bargain hunter. Stalwart co-workers included Ed U. and Yvonne B., Graziella S., Frances G., and Tania S.W. And, of course, thanks to all who helped fill the coffers of Prairie Dog Pals!

Not everything sells at a garage sale, of course, and we had our share of leftovers. Of the better items, Frances took some to a thrift shop from which we will still get a percentage. We are offering other items on eBay. This should raise the total to well above \$800. In addition, we sent a large truckload to the Animal Humane thrift shop, and Dick W. took a full carload to the Hug A Horse store in Edgewood to benefit the Walkin' N' Circles Ranch. The kitchen sink, sadly, did not sell and was taken with other large construction project materials to ReStore, where sales benefit Habitat For Humanity.

We will do this again next summer and, hopefully, raise even more money. So when planning a spring cleanup, please do think about our summer sale and donate those items to help out our prairie dogs.



*Parsimonious Pete, the "early bird" bane of garage sale hosts the world over, anxiously awaits opening bell! ❖*

# Prairie Dog Coalition Annual Tech Meeting

By Raymond Watt

Those of you who support prairie dogs through donations of money or time, by feeding desperate colonies, or helping to trap and relocate, all can rightly feel a sense of accomplishment at the end of the season. Our efforts have made a difference in the lives of individual animals and, more importantly, in the survival of the Gunnison's species as a whole. Considering that the Rio Grande valley once contained perhaps millions of prairie dogs but is now an area made unwelcome for them, it is easy to realize the scope of our work. Hundreds of pockets of small colonies cut off from each other and often lacking in food and water sources is clearly an unacceptable situation. With our relatively small group here in Prairie Dog Pals, it is easy to feel somewhat isolated and overwhelmed here in Albuquerque. It is hard to escape the feeling that we are the few battling an army of the ill informed, unconcerned and heartless... and doing it all alone.

But we are not alone. Prairie Dog Pals is a member of the Prairie Dog Coalition (PDC), as are dozens of other groups and individuals, such as the Fund for Animals and the Center for Biological Diversity. We are a major force in protecting Gunnison's prairie dogs; other groups are dedicated to the protection of the black-tailed, white-tailed, Utah, and Mexican prairie dogs. Each group has a niche and has adapted itself to the local threats, ordinances, and political situations that they face. We all agree that the prairie dog is a keystone species in serious decline, and like the bison, is an integral part of the west.

During June, I attended the Prairie Dog Coalition meeting in Denver. It was like getting a B vitamin shot with new energy in the form of information, creative ideas, and the inspiration of talented and dedicated people who seem undaunted by the obstacles we face. Knowing there are so many who care deeply about all the prairie dog species is a reminder that our efforts are part of the bigger picture.

During the three days of meetings at the Denver Zoo, we covered so much material that presenting it all here would leave little room in this newsletter for anything else. But I will touch on a few of the major discussion points. While the goal of all those who attended is to protect prairie dogs in both urban and wild environments, it's clear the emphasis for most member organizations is wild colonies and reintroduction of prairie dogs into areas where they have been eliminated. This is why coalition members were so impressed by our work in conjunction with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to reestablish prairie dogs on the Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge. By removing these prairie dogs from all the urban hazards and putting them in a protected area, we are allowing them to prosper and propagate the species.

*Continued on page 18*

Coalition members certainly have not given up on urban prairie dogs, but they are looking for strategies that provide the most impact on survival of the prairie dog species. Some participants presented a paper titled, "Federal Protection for the Prairie Dog Ecosystem: A Look Back and Ahead." The basic premise of this paper was that for all species of prairie dogs the key to long-term survival is: large and remote parcels of land where prairie dogs are a part of a protected ecosystem. Nobody wants to abandon the prairie dogs living in medians or on the side of the roads, but with limited resources of funds and manpower, the hope is to get large preserves established while there is still such land available.

A lot of discussion centered on land suitable for prairie dogs and other animals within the prairie ecosystem, such as black-footed ferrets. The paper included data from a range-wide prairie dog mapping project. It estimated that there are as many as 232 million acres of potential habitat, and of this, there are about 51 million acres (in 5,000-acre parcels) that are politically feasible. Finally, only 68 specific areas, which encompass just under 13 million acres, were considered prime areas on which to focus. The group looked at several areas that met the criteria of having sufficient food resources and being large enough to support significant colonies.

Existing public lands have always been a top consideration because some of these areas already support prairie dogs, they are generally large, and there are no property rights issues with which to contend. Unfortunately, many prime areas suitable for reestablishing prairie dogs are privately held. While some farmers and ranchers who own these lands are sympathetic to these efforts, most are openly hostile to prairie dogs, and in fact, are responsible for countless deaths due to poisoning and shooting. There was some talk of purchasing private land for relocations, but in most cases the costs are beyond the budgets of member organizations.

While urban prairie dogs provide a good genetic gene pool for relocations to preserves, coalition members also recognized that it is possible to maintain smaller urban prairie dog parks. Much of this depends upon local governments and the attitude of the citizens. The majority of people in cities like Albuquerque and Denver oppose poisoning and are supportive of humane treatment of prairie dogs. The question is whether this would translate into strong prairie dog protections and open areas where small colonies could live unmolested. The discussions here found that citizens' attitudes were critical, and that in ranching communities, for example, it may be impossible to change long-held beliefs about prairie dogs.

The solution is education and reaching students before they form these hardened opinions. Many members at the meeting felt that we were not making progress fast enough in educating students and the general public or in making our case to the media.

Coalition members discussed the role of climate change. With water sources already scarce in the West, increasing drought conditions will put additional pressure on prairie dog colonies. Two trends that mitigate the pressure on colonies are the increased migration of people from rural to urban areas and the overall decline of those who consider themselves hunters. There are numerous factors that can have both positive and negative influences when it comes to prairie dog populations, but the primary contributor to decline is human overpopulation. The higher our population, the higher the demand is for land, food, and other resources. This issue is at the root of habitat loss, climate change, and species extinction around the world. Until we deal seriously with overpopulation, all species, including prairie dogs, will lose ground.

Our brainstorming sessions led to many ideas, both esoteric and concrete, to be taken up by member groups and used to make our work more successful. By no means can we solve all our challenges at once, but in sharing our knowledge of what works and what doesn't, we become stronger and more efficient. I think many of us left the Denver meeting feeling we had just overeaten at a great restaurant, except we had knowledge and ideas to digest. It is comforting and humbling to know that so many are devoting so much time and energy to preserving this great symbol of the American West.



*Jonathon Proctor discusses former prairie dog range.*



*Lindsey Sterling-Krank making a point ❖*

## Past and Future

On September 23rd, Prairie Dog Pals completed another successful season with the release of 45 prairie dogs to the Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge. Two juveniles who were underweight and another who had serious dental issues were not released and will be “wintering” over with us. In 2011, we relocated 866 prairie dogs and 8 squirrels. These accomplishments would not have been possible without the combined efforts of our volunteers, US Fish and Wildlife, the Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge, UNM, Albuquerque Parks and Recreation, and the Moriarity/Edgewood School District.

The prairie dogs we relocated came from sites where they were not welcome by the human residents, or where the habitat was disappearing, or no longer suitable to sustain them. Had we not intervened, they would have eventually died. Now they face other challenges, such as predators, but at least they do so in a natural environment with native food. ❖

### Annual Meeting

The annual meeting will be conducted on January 28<sup>th</sup>, 2012. We try to plan the meeting as close to Prairie Dog Day (aka Groundhog Day) as possible, but with many of our members working, it is more inclusive to schedule this meeting on the weekend. So mark your calendars and plan to attend. We'll be sending out a reminder notice prior to the meeting. ❖

## In Memoriam

In September, we learned of the sad demise of Rachel, a compromised prairie dog fostered for the last few years by the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance (NMWA). Rachel is survived by Mardy, her cage mate and “comrade in rescue.” The two females were rescued as juveniles from Grace Baptist Church after poisoning wiped out their entire colony. Rachel and Mardy were named for Rachel Carson and Mardy Murie, two larger-than-life environmentalists, whose philosophies and principles still guide green-thinking individuals today. After their dreadful experience as pups, the girls spent their lives together under the doting and watchful eyes of the entire NMWA staff. They served as ambassadors for their species, delighting guests who visited the office.

NMWA had offered to foster these two damaged little females with the full knowledge that their exposure to the poison that killed their entire families would very likely cut their lives short. Indeed, Rachel, whose lungs and nervous system were significantly damaged by the poison, suffered frequent seizures throughout her life; Mardy's health issues seemed somewhat milder by comparison. Both, however, enjoyed nutritious food, clean bedding hay, and complete safety in compensation for their earlier misfortunes. As time went on, all of us had begun to breathe a little easier... as one year grew to two, then three, it seemed these undersized little spokes-rodents might beat the odds.

We are somewhat grateful that Rachel's passing occurred at the beginning of a hibernation cycle, and that Mardy may sleep through the worst part of her loneliness. Despite our hopes to the contrary, spring is likely to bring yet another compromised or injured young female who will not be able to accompany her family to native habitat when at-risk colonies are relocated. If and when that sad circumstance does occur, we know that Mardy and New Mexico Wilderness Alliance will welcome Mardy another companion to their loving, sheltering home. ❖

## Quilt Raffle

Inara K. has created another fabulous prairie dog quilt. Her quilts are pieces of art, as they embody not only prairie dogs, but also other animal prints and signature stitching. This quilt includes burrowing owls! The quilt is 34x47". \$2/ticket or \$10/6 Tickets

The drawing will be on February 2nd, 2012, Prairie Dog Day, and you need not be present to win.



Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Street: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of tickets: \_\_\_\_\_



PO Box 14235  
Albuquerque, NM 87191

STAMP  
HERE

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

Mailing Address  
Street Number and Name  
City, State 98765-4321

**Tipping Point**  
**Conservation vs restoration....**

Prairie dogs are key to 150 species of wildlife & the health of arid grasslands.

<http://www.prairiedogpals.org/>

Prairie Dog Pals  
PO Box 14235  
Albuquerque, NM 97191  
TAD (Telephone/FAX): 505.296.1937  
Email: [prairiedogpals@comcast.net](mailto:prairiedogpals@comcast.net)

## Are you a supporter of Prairie Dog Pals?

Here's how you can help:

- Volunteer** to be a steward, outreach spokesperson, relocater, or other prairie dog pal!
- Use your** administrative skills to help us with our web site, PR, outreach, and more!
- Make a donation** to support our work!

We also accept additional donations of food and other needed supplies.

I would like to support Prairie Dog Pals. Enclosed is my check for \$ \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to volunteer to help Prairie Dog Pals. Please contact me at the following:

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Send your tax deductible contribution to: Prairie Dog Pals, PO Box 14235, Albuquerque, NM 87191