



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.

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Yips & Nips

Yips! to Prairie Dog Pals (PDP) volunteer Becky D. for garnering positive publicity for prairie dogs. In February this year, she reached out to TV station KOB4 and did an on-screen interview with reporter Eddie Garcia. You can see the clip at <http://www.kob.com/albuquerque-news/group-wants-feb-2-to-become-prairie-dog-day-in-new-mexico/4389745/>.

Yips! to this year's Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) interns and volunteers who made our job so much easier! Summer interns: Ashley R., Cristian H., Sierra S., and Will J. Fall interns: Brennan R. and Maggie S. Volunteers: Jodi and Steve K., Elvic T., and Will K.

Yips! to two Albuquerque developers for giving consideration to the resident prairie dogs at their constructions sites. Rob McKinley of Worque, LLC. allowed us access to his site so that we could attempt a rescue of two prairie dogs. Jason B. of Fair and Square Builders contracted with PDP to humanely remove prairie dogs and other wildlife prior to breaking ground. Read "Treating Wildlife Fair and Square" on page 6.

Nips! to the First Baptist Church of Moriarty. They asked for our help to remove prairie dogs from their property. When Ed U. (a.k.a. Cynomys Rex) went out to do a survey, he remarked that he didn't see many prairie dogs. They replied, "That's because we poisoned last month."

Nips! to Donald Trump Jr. and Montana Republican Greg Gianforte, who spent Earth Day 2017 shooting prairie dogs. Trump Jr. was in Montana to stump for Gianforte, a candidate for the U.S. House of Representatives. Gianforte was quoted as saying, "As good Montanans, we want to show good hospitality to people. What can be more fun than to spend an afternoon shooting the little rodents?"

Nips! to the Trump administration for rescinding protections for wildlife, for backing out of the Paris Climate Accord, for shrinking our national monuments,...and so much more!

Note: A good place to keep up on assaults being waged against our wildlife and the lands, waters, and climate they depend on for survival is the website of the Center for Biological Diversity. Check it out at:

<http://www.biologicaldiversity.org/news/breaking/>. ❖

Special Thanks

Thanks to **Sara S.** who recently made a sizeable donation to our cause! Our site stewards work hard to provide food at sites where native vegetation won't support the resident prairie dogs. PDP maintains an annual stipend to provide our stewards with dry food and carrots. The cost per week varies, but averages about \$75. With the prairie dogs active from March through September (about 28 weeks), that adds up to \$2,100. Our stewards also scavenge produce from local markets, for without their efforts our costs could easily triple. Sara's donation will offset a large portion of our supplemental food expense in 2018. Thank you, Sara! On behalf of the prairie dogs along I-40 and Tramway Blvd., PDP bestows on you the title of honorary town mother!

Thanks to the uncommon generosity of **Jim T.**, PDP has two new custom-made tablecloths to adorn our tables at outreach events. Previously, we tied a banner to the front of the table. If you ever volunteered at one of these events, you know what a pain that was. Jim recognized the problem and took action to fix it, driving the acquisition from start to finish. He identified a company—Achievement Gallery—that could fabricate custom printed tablecloths, worked with fellow board member Sharyn D. to come up with the design, and made a substantial donation to cover the full cost. Thanks Jim!



Jim T. and Yvonne B. tabling at Celebrate Sevilleta! Note the lovely tablecloth adorning the table.

Thanks, also, to **Jane L.** for making our annual garage sale such a success. Read "Serendipitous Connections" and "Annual Garage Sale" on page 16. ❖

Annual Meeting

PDP held its annual board meeting and general membership meeting on February 5, 2017, at the James Joseph Dwyer Memorial Police Substation. Here are the highlights:

New Board Members: President Yvonne B. announced the addition of three new members to PDP's board. All three have been active volunteers in our organization for years. Carolyn McElroy joined the board as our Legal Advisor after the 2016 board meeting. This year the board voted to add to its ranks Jim Trever as Outreach Coordinator and Frances Gauthier as Editor.

Finance: The board voted to divest from Wells Fargo Bank because of its fraudulent practices involving client accounts and because of its support for the Dakota Access Pipeline. Per board direction, Ray W. has moved our funds to a local credit union.

We have taken some cost-saving measures. We canceled the credit reporting service from Dunn & Bradstreet, which cost us \$1000 annually, but retained the free service that allows PDP to receive payments from government organizations. Turning in the water meter at the end of the season saves us the \$75 monthly rental fee during down months, for an annual savings of \$400. In the past, we kept the meter through the winter because the city did not have enough to meet demand, making it hard to get one when spring arrived. We still need to pay a \$3000 refundable deposit when we rent the meter.

The board approved continuing through 2017 the supplemental feeding stipend. This program provides food for prairie dogs along the I-40 and Tramway Blvd. corridors. In addition, the board approved spending \$200 to purchase two new tires for the Suburban and \$370 to renew our web address for five years.

Our fundraising took a big hit when the Weems International Artfest ended in 2014. Since our volunteers are stretched so thin, passive fundraising is especially advantageous for us. Albertsons grocery stores discontinued its Community Partners program, but we are still enrolled in the Smith's Community Rewards program. We also participate in programs that generate donations through online shopping, such as Amazon Smile and iGive. We want to increase participation in these passive fundraising programs.

Operations: Ed U. reported that we had captured and released 704 prairie dogs in the 2016 season. He was also happy to divulge that we already had a contract with the city for 2017 and were expecting one from Albuquerque Public Schools (APS).

Because of incidences of plague in the Santa Fe area, the New Mexico Department of Health has recommended that captured prairie dogs be quarantined for 21 days prior to release and that those from plague endemic areas not be relocated to historically plague-free habitat. Following those recommendations, PDP sent letters in January to our previous East Mountain clients advising them that we have suspended relocations from that area until a new relocation site can be found. PDP also sent letters to the Bureau of Land Management, National Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and New Mexico Land Commissioner in our search for habitat that could host prairie dogs from plague endemic areas. So far, we have not been successful.

Special Projects & Artwork: Sharyn D. continues to post her charming artwork (prairie dogs photo-shopped with holiday themes) to our Facebook page. They are very popular—her Christmas and New Year's posts got over 4000 likes. She also developed a calendar with the holiday artwork. Greeting cards are available for sale on our website.

Legal : Carolyn M. updated PDP's volunteer liability waiver. All volunteers must sign one before participating in any PDP activity. A parent or guardian must sign the waiver for anyone under the age of consent.

Humane Alliance: Phil C. reported on the progress of New Mexico Senate Bill 468 that would ban coyote killing contests. He urged PDP's members to show their support for the bill by contacting their representatives and by showing up at the Roundhouse on Animal Lobby Day and/or the Sierra Club's Water, Wildlands, Wildlife Day. Other members offered information on various upcoming rallies to support legislation for spay and neuter programs, wolf conservation, and a ban on mandatory euthanasia of bears. Though we have a passion for prairie dogs, many of our members find time to advocate for other wildlife and domestic animals. ❖

New Board Members

By Yvonne Boudreaux

Carolyn (C.J.) McElroy has long been a friend to animals. When she lived back east, she served on the board of directors of the Snyder Foundation for Animals in Baltimore, Maryland, an organization with an \$8 million endowment whose mission is to fund projects that benefit animals in that region. Its grants facilitate projects for animal shelters and rescue groups, as well as education on animal issues. One of its long-standing projects is funding the distribution of the Humane Society of the United States' magazine for kids, "Kind News," to K-6 grade students in Baltimore public schools. The magazine promotes kindness and respect for animals and their habitats. Carolyn's main job with the foundation was to evaluate grant proposals, and she says that she had such fun giving money away to help animals.

In 2009, she moved to New Mexico, settling on the Deer Canyon Preserve near Mountainair, about 20 miles from the Sevilleta NWR. She liked the fact that landowners were allowed to build on only one acre of their land, leaving the rest to provide crucial habitat for native wildlife. Before she purchased the land in 2007, the developer had promised that the land could be used for the repatriation of prairie dogs, and at the time the Heritage Conservancy was planning to do just that. Unfortunately, when publicity about the project caught the eyes of ranchers who owned land adjacent to the preserve, Torrance County promptly banned relocation of prairie dogs into the county. The Heritage Conservancy went defunct, and most of the preserve's 11,000 acres are now under the stewardship of the New Mexico Land Conservancy, providing much needed habitat for wildlife.

We met Carolyn in 2013 when PDP donated a "field experience" for an online auction to support public radio station KUNM. She did place the high bid, but PDP was actually the winner because we gained a terrific volunteer! For her prize, Carolyn joined us on a release at the Sevilleta NWR and even volunteered to come and

help process the prairie dogs beforehand. She was hooked! Since then, she has participated in a number of releases and even helped with the arduous job of digging out starter burrows at the Sevilleta NWR. Lately, Carolyn has helped with our outreach program, which we especially appreciate considering how far she has to drive when an event is in the Albuquerque area.

After our 2016 board meeting, we asked Carolyn to join our board as our Legal Advisor. She is a retired attorney, who had specialized in health care law and was formerly a member of the Maryland State Bar Association and the District of Columbia Bar Association. Carolyn has already proven to be an asset to our organization. She revised our liability waiver to protect PDP from litigation. She also researched a proposed land endowment and advised us to decline the donation because the underlying land had numerous liens and legal complications, saving us from an entanglement that likely had no benefit. We are so happy to have Carolyn on board!

Jim Trever has the unusual distinction of having joined PDP before he even relocated to Albuquerque in 2010! He had been a licensed wildlife rehabilitator in North Carolina for 14 years, where he worked with orphaned squirrels. Jim fell in love with prairie dogs after adopting five black-tails from the pet trade that were in need of a good home. He decided that when he got to Albuquerque he would put his experience to work making a difference in the lives of our local Gunnison's prairie dogs.

Jim has supported our organization in so many ways. During his first few years, he was involved with field operations, helping with flushing, processing, and releases. Of late, he has been using his skills as a photographer and videographer to document our field work and thrill our online followers with vicarious experiences. He has also been a generous donor through the years, quietly funding special needs that have cropped up now and again.

Over the years Jim has given a loving home to many prairie dogs. Some were black-tails that came from the pet trade and had suffered from neglect. Many were compromised Gunnison's that couldn't be released to the wild because of health issues, such as blindness, paralysis, and missing incisors. Some were just old and needed end of life care. Jim willingly agreed to foster these prairie dogs, knowing full well the time and expense that their care would involve—and the heartbreak that comes from losing them.

Jim's biggest contribution to our organization has been the time and passion he has given to our outreach program. It was a natural fit because he has a gift for gab and seemingly has never met a stranger. No venue was ever too windy, no group too small, for Jim to reach out and educate and inform the curious. Ignoring the advice of W.C. Fields to never work with animals or children, Jim prefers to work with a "spokesrodent" (usually one of his foster prairie dogs), knowing that he will always be upstaged by his small furry companion. Whether tabling at a public event or speaking to a group, Jim can always be seen wearing one of his signature prairie dog T-shirts, and he adds to our coffers by never missing a chance to sell one of our plush prairie dogs.

Jim has connected with all manner of audiences, from grade school kids to senior citizens. He created three separate versions of our Powerpoint presentation to target different age groups: one for grades K-5, another for grades 6-12, and an adult version.

Jim has accommodated short-notice requests and even early morning show times. (He spoke at a Civitan Club breakfast meeting at 6:30 A.M.) He's often tasked with delivering multiple presentations. Once he did a marathon stint at a high school, where he presented the lecture five times in back-to-back sessions. Jim could probably recite the "Prairie Dogs in Peril" lecture in his sleep. He has presented it 45 times to a total of over 2000 people. He reaches thousands more individuals by tabling four to six times a year. We know what a fine job Jim is doing because he receives so many requests for return engagements. We made it official this year and asked Jim to join PDP's board as our Outreach Coordinator. We are delighted that he accepted.

Frances Gauthier became a member of PDP in 2007, less than three months after retiring from the United States Air Force. Prior to living in Albuquerque, her only experience with prairie dogs was seeing them in a zoo; so she was absolutely enchanted by a prairie dog colony not far from her house. When she spied traps on the colony, she accosted our volunteers to make sure that they meant no harm to "her" prairie dogs. She ended up spending the day with them as they monitored the traps, and in the process learned about PDP's mission.

It was several weeks later when I met Frances, and I'll never forget the date—July 21. She called PDP to say that she wanted to bring us a piece of equipment mistakenly left at the site. Our long enjoyable conversation evolved into a ten year long friendship and collaboration. When she came to visit the staging facility that afternoon, our voices were almost drowned out by the din of barking prairie dogs. Suddenly, Frances broke into a gentle song. One by one, each prairie dog fell silent, until the only sound was her soothing voice. Some prairie dogs even stood with their paws against the tank walls peering up through the tank lid screens to see who was serenading them. I was astonished to see the effect she had on them!

That very day Frances became a PDP volunteer and staunch advocate for prairie dogs. Over the past decade she has participated in practically every function of our organization. In the early days, she spent many hours doing data entry of contact information. She managed our staging facility with tireless devotion for many years. She cared for sick and injured prairie dogs and provided special feeding for underweight pups, allowing them to be released with their families when the time came. For a number of prairie dogs that were deemed un-releasable, Frances provided a loving home. She has trapped prairie dogs at numerous sites, including challenging ones such as the interstate ramps. While she admits she doesn't have the nerve to flush, she's always willing to back up a flusher with a net and handle the hoses. She has given tours of the staging facility, educated new volunteers, monitored sites, networked with site stewards, and been a valuable member of processing and release crews. She has tabled at outreach events and even developed merchandise to sell, like our metal wind chimes. Frances talks about prairie dogs and PDP wherever she goes, even in grocery lines or theater queues. She's always looking to recruit new prairie dog pals.

In recent years Frances has employed yet another skill set on behalf of PDP. With creativity, attention to detail, and relentless fact-checking, her phenomenal work as editor of our newsletter has produced a publication which has garnered many compliments. We, as contributors, have such confidence in her

that we never need review what she has revised, rewritten, reworked, condensed, and cleaned-up on our behalf. We know that she will polish our thoughts into thoroughly readable stories. So, this year we decided that we just had to insist that she join our board. Thankfully, she said, “Yes.” ❖

Site Stewardship

Our hard-working crew of Bobbie C., Becky D., Mike T., and Loretta G. continued their mission of delivering food to the prairie dogs that live near the I-40 on-/off-ramps. Debbie S., who joined PDP in 2016, has been helping them when she can. We have other dedicated stewards who feed colonies in need on Tramway Blvd. Alice C. sustains the colony on the northwest corner at Cloudview Ave., and Veronica W. feeds at the northwest corner at Lomas Blvd. Board member Graziella S. tended to the Indian School prairie dogs until those sites were cleared this summer. Next year she’ll take a look at where her efforts can best be put to use. To all our stewards, THANK YOU for all that you do!

We’d like to give a special shout-out to Priscilla T., who delivers food to many colonies. She had been feeding prairie dogs independently for many years before we became aware of her efforts in 2015. Her dedication is amazing—she currently feeds prairie dogs seven days a week during their active season. Priscilla, we’re happy that you’ve joined our team! ❖



Priscilla T. preparing to feed a colony

Eyes On The Ground

While Albuquerque, for the most part, has historically been free of plague, there continue to be cases of it in Santa Fe and the East Mountains on a somewhat regular basis. In 2016, there was a case of plague reported in a stray cat in the Sandia Heights area. Prior to trapping or flushing, PDP typically observes a prairie dog colony for a few days to determine that the residents are healthy.

We have implemented a formal log to capture this information and need some assistance with this effort. If you would like to

help, here’s how. Adopt a site, visit it frequently, take note of the activity there (normal/no activity/anything that seems abnormal), and report your findings with the location and date and time of your visit to prairiedogpals@comcast.net. In fact, anytime that you visit any prairie dog site, a report would be appreciated. ❖

First Rescue of the Season

PDP’s spring season almost always starts with a singleton rescue. This year was no different—except that the singleton was a guinea pig! The first call on February 18 was a plea for help from Sharon N., a kindhearted woman who lives in a gated community not far from PDP’s home base. She reported that she had spotted an animal behind the community dumpster and, on closer inspection, determined that it was a tri-colored guinea pig. Yvonne assured Sharon that she would help, and Sharon promised to not let the guinea pig out of her sight until Yvonne could arrive. Fortunately, C. Rex agreed to join Yvonne, or the rescue could have been a drama rather than merely a comedy.

Worried that the poor critter might move to a more precarious position, Yvonne and C. Rex made a hasty departure, grabbing only a kennel and a towel. They arrived to find Sharon waiting patiently, and seemingly not nearly as worried as they were. The reason soon became clear. There was a narrow space between the dumpster and a chain link fence that extended below ground. The guinea pig sat quietly crouching halfway between the only two points of exit. Yvonne and C. Rex positioned themselves at either end of the narrow passageway, but the little cavy, knowing it was out of their reach, barely acknowledged their presence.

They were at an impasse—one of the rescuers would have to get down and dirty. Yvonne squeezed her body sideways into the narrow opening, bowing out the fence as much as it would give. Laying on her right side, wedged between the dumpster and the fence, Yvonne could barely move. She fought to push forward inch by inch. Once she got close enough, she would have to change her orientation to make the grab. There was just enough room to twist her shoulder and reach her left arm overhead. In a quick motion, she stretched out her arm and clamped her hand down as firmly as possible to “pin the pig.”

At this point, Yvonne realized that, with one hand on the guinea pig, she was unable to move backward. She would have laughed at her predicament, but there was no room to do so! Once C. Rex was certain that Yvonne had a firm grip on the guinea pig, he bolted to the other side of the dumpster, where only Yvonne’s legs protruded from the aperture. He quickly dragged her out, with absolutely no decorum whatsoever. Fortunately, Sharon was kind enough to not photograph that part—or laugh out loud. Since there was no way to know whether the guinea pig had been lost or simply dumped, Sharon agreed to post signs around the complex inquiring if anyone had lost a guinea pig.

Back at home Yvonne set the guinea pig up in comfortable digs in the “rodent room.” C. Rex did a quick sex check and, based on his experience with prairie dogs, decided that the guinea pig was a girl. The little female wanted NOTHING to do with the other rescue animals in the room—a rabbit, a pocket gopher, and several black-tailed prairie dogs. She barely acknowledged Yvonne, who tried to bribe her with regularly proffered treats of

all kinds. Frances G., enchanted by the beautiful creature, tried to befriend her as well, but the little cavy remained aloof. At the time, Frances had a tune from the musical *Damn Yankees* stuck in her head... "Whatever Lola wants, Lola gets"... and the name Lola just seemed to suit the little guinea pig.



Yvonne consulted local guinea pig expert, Cindy C., for help. Yvonne's and Frances' overtures to the guinea pig had been all wrong. It turns out prairie dogs and guinea pigs have very different preference when it comes to being petted. Torn between her fondness for Lola and her desire to give her the best life possible, Yvonne surrendered her into Cindy's care. Lola joined a large "family" of guinea pigs that had been rescued from all sorts of bad situations. In the company of her own kind, she began to blossom and her personality emerge. There's one more thing that the rescuers got wrong—Lola was a boy! Cindy renamed him Lloyd, and he found a new best friend named Mikey. ❖

Collateral Rescues

On February 25, Cory E. called PDP asking for help because she could hear an animal scratching underneath her house. Margaret D., our board member in charge of singleton rescues, took over the case. Upon arrival at the house near 4th St. and Griegos Rd., she found paw prints that were approximately two inches long; so she knew she was definitely dealing with an animal larger than a prairie dog—maybe a raccoon. Cory prepared a veritable feast with which to bait Margaret's trap—carrots, greens, tomatoes, sunflower seeds, and a can of tuna! The next morning Cory called to report that the unwanted guest turned out to be... a SKUNK!

Margaret and C. Rex decided that special precautions were in order for this relocation. They lined the back of C. Rex's van with large sheets of plastic before leaving for Cory's house. When they arrived, they saw the small skunk sitting calmly in the trap, no doubt experiencing a food coma after having imbibed such a feast. It had eaten the full can of tuna and most of the other food. Margaret found the petite mammal exceedingly cute and had the sense that it was female, but neither she nor C. Rex was prepared to get close enough to confirm her theory. They carefully covered the trap with a blanket and loaded it into the van.

C. Rex and Margaret drove with their charge east past the mountains. Though there were no doubt skunks in that area, they did not want to leave this one where it might be confronted by humans again; so they turned the van onto Highway 536 and

headed up the mountain to find a nice wild spot for the release. C. Rex gingerly lifted the covered trap from the back of the van, placed it on the ground, pulled back the blanket from one end, and pinned the trap door open. He and Margaret stepped back and waited for the little skunk to jaunt off to freedom, but it didn't make a move. They carefully grabbed the covered end of the trap and tipped it up slightly. The skunk slowly emerged, looked one way and then the other, and waddled up the hill.

On February 28, Cory called Margaret again, saying that there was still something underneath her house. Could it be another skunk? Margaret set the trap as before, filled with goodies. When she returned the next morning, she found a handsome male orange tabby cat. He probably wasn't too interested in the vegetables—good thing they had included the tuna! Margaret took the tom to Street Cat Hub, an organization that provides TNR (trap, neuter, return) services for Albuquerque's free roaming felines.

Our first rescue of the season was on February 12 when Yvonne B. wrangled a guinea pig. Graziella S. trapped on the northeast corner of Lomas and Tramway Blvds. on February 25 and caught one male prairie dog. On March 3, C. Rex, Mike T., and Margaret flushed the site on Menaul Blvd. just west of the Valero station at Tramway Blvd. They caught a squirrel and a rat, but no prairie dogs. So, in summary, of the first seven animals we relocated this year, only one was a prairie dog—the others were a guinea pig, a skunk, a cat, a squirrel, and two rats. Maybe we should change our name to "Critters R Us" or "The Albuquerque Ark!" ❖

The Chelwood Triangle

No, this is not a disaster story about would-be rescuers disappearing into the mist. It's about three adjacent properties that lie within the roughly triangular area circumscribed by Indian School Rd, Constitution Ave., and Chelwood Blvd. What disappears from this triangle are prairie dogs that are humanely relocated to wild habitat. The problem in the "Chelwood Triangle" hinged on the fact that prairie dogs do not recognize human property boundaries. Any plot of land that is cleared of prairie dogs will not remain so if there are prairie dogs on adjacent properties. Our story starts roughly 15 years ago.

During the 2001-2002 school year, a third-grader named Ellie C. got wind of a plan to poison the prairie dogs that resided on the field at her school, Chelwood Elementary. She and her friend, Becca B., marched around the playground with signs of protest and collected three pages of signatures on a petition to stop the poisoning. The activism of these young girls prevailed, and the school agreed not to poison the prairie dogs. The children and the prairie dogs coexisted for the next few years.

In 2004, a botched poisoning was conducted at Hayes Middle School, a joint-use site (one used and managed jointly by the city and APS). The public outcry following this incident was so great that the mayor and APS turned to PDP for help, and we got contracts to work on clearing a number of sites, including Chelwood Elementary. We cleared the field, but since there were still prairie dogs in the neighborhood, we advised APS that a maintenance contract was in order. Unfortunately, that recommendation fell on deaf ears.

In 2006, we were contacted by the owners of two other properties within the triangle. Patrick S., owner of the real estate development firm The Strosnider Company, contracted with us to relocate the prairie dogs on the vacant lot east of the school, where he was planning to build condominiums. We spent several weeks trapping and were able to clear that lot before construction began. We also did some work for Blue Cross/Blue Shield, which was located just around the corner on Indian School Rd, but were not able to clear that area completely during the season.

Meanwhile, the little girl whose valiant efforts had stopped the poisoning at Chelwood Elementary was growing up, but had not lost her love for prairie dogs. She was 13 years old in 2007 when she heard about the work of PDP and called to volunteer. Ellie was brimming with such energy and passion for wildlife conservation that we decided to hire her as a summer intern. Enticed by the carpet of green grass, prairie dogs had moved back to the field at Chelwood Elementary. APS issued a purchase order that year, and our new intern, Ellie, was able to save prairie dogs there once again! She helped relocate 36 to wild habitat.

Meanwhile, the prairie dog population was also rebounding on the lot owned by Blue Cross/Blue Shield. The company moved to Rio Rancho and sold the property to Calvary Church. In 2009, when the church's leadership decided they wanted to install a playground, their maintenance man started shooting prairie dogs with an air gun, killing two before outraged neighbors called the police. After the story made the local news, advocacy by a city councilor convinced them to work with us, and an anonymous donor offered to cover our costs, something the church was unwilling to do. Ellie was part of our crew that rescued 63 prairie dogs and relocated them to a tract of pristine grassland in northern New Mexico.

Four years passed, over which APS officials again neglected to arrange any follow-up work at Chelwood Elementary. In the final days of our 2013 season, we received their plea for help and a short-notice contract. This was a familiar pattern in our dealings with APS. We sent letters to them every year encouraging them to issue purchase orders in the spring when capturing fertile females serves as a force multiplier; but they would procrastinate until the approaching school term spurred their sense of urgency. Trying to clear a colony as fall nears is ineffective because prairie dogs exposed to stress late in the season can close their burrows and go into torpor early, delaying the opportunity to capture those individuals until the following spring. With so little time before season's end, we were only able to reduce the population by 27.

By 2016, the prairie dog population at the school was booming. We had been besieged by phone calls from angry parents and school staff for two years. Despite our explanations that we needed a contract to work on school property, none of them made the more appropriate call to see that a contract was issued. Sensing that the situation was becoming dire, Ray W. offered to start flushing at Chelwood Elementary in the spring if APS would sign a memo of understanding. Instead they issued a purchase order on March 31, the absolute last day of our spring season. Still, there was room for optimism. Margaret had rescued a wayward prairie dog from inside the Calvary Church offices earlier that spring; otherwise, that area seemed to be clear. The only prairie dogs left within the Chelwood Triangle were on the school grounds and on the adjacent embankment between there

and the condominiums. With the entire summer to work on it, this might finally be the year that we would clear the triangle.

Ray and three interns from the Sevilleta NWR kicked off the project that June. He, Mike T., and C. Rex continued to flush through the summer. When there were only a few prairie dogs left, C. Rex and Frances G. pressed on, continuing even after school started by showing up on afternoons and weekends. Our crew made over 32 visits to Chelwood Elementary in 2016 and removed 148 prairie dogs. APS sure can't say they didn't get their money's worth!

At the end of the season, there were no open burrows on the field, but Frances thought she'd seen a prairie dog on the embankment. APS did give us a follow-up contract for 2017. C. Rex visited the site several times during the first couple of weeks in March. On each successive visit, he became more excited at the possibility that the field was clear. His hopes were dashed on week three when he found an open burrow...then a second one...then a third and a fourth. Fortunately, they were all close together. He flushed the burrows—with no luck—and covered them. The next day there were two open burrows. Mike flushed a female prairie dog—the one we HOPE is the LAST prairie dog from the Chelwood Triangle.

And the young lady from Chelwood Elementary, you ask? After working with us for five summers, Ellie applied to the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry. The essay she wrote about her work with PDP conveyed her enormous passion for conservation. The college accepted her and offered a great scholarship package. In 2015, she graduated Magna Cum Laude with a Bachelor of Science degree in Conservation Biology. Ellie is planning to start graduate school soon and wants to become a high school science teacher so that she can inspire the next generation to respect and protect our planet and all its inhabitants. ❖

Treating Wildlife Fair and Square

This story is about a colony of prairie dogs that experienced the worst and best of human behavior. Just west of the Valero gas station on the corner of Menaul and Tramway Blvds. is a small plot of land that was once home to a variety of wildlife, including a thriving colony of about 75 prairie dogs. In 2007, the man who owned the property had the land poisoned, despite pleas from PDP and his neighbors not to do so. The poison was both indiscriminate and long-lasting. It killed prairie dogs, other burrowing mammals, and some birds too. One of the neighbors was sure that it was the cause of her cat's untimely death as well. The poison remained a threat for some time. The following year, all 8 prairie dogs that we captured from the adjoining strip of land along Tramway died within days of arriving in the staging facility. By 2011, there were only a couple of prairie dogs left on the entire lot, and who is to say that their health was not compromised by the lingering poison.

Over time the poison degraded or was sufficiently diluted by each year's monsoon, and wildlife began to make a comeback on the site. In 2013, a full six years after the poisoning, we observed a population of 15-20 prairie dogs. The owner of the property died, and his out-of-state heir engaged a real estate company to sell the

property. We began trapping at the site in 2014, but our experience has been that prairie dogs are more wary and harder to capture at sites that have been poisoned. We only caught two prairie dogs that year and the next. We finally started making some headway in 2016, catching five prairie dogs that spring and another 41 during the summer.

We had hoped to finish clearing the site in the spring, but before the end of the year, we learned that the property had been sold and a developer was planning to build apartments there. We were even more anxious when we discovered that ground-breaking could begin as early as February, before the prairie dogs would emerge from their winter torpor. Giving a boost to our faith in humanity, Jason B. of Fair and Square Builders contacted us in early January with a request to humanely remove the prairie dogs. We were more than happy to oblige with a proposal, which he accepted. Unfortunately, the prairie dogs were still hibernating. Jason was eager to start construction, but he agreed to a delay.

The big question was: would the prairie dogs come up in time? C. Rex, Suzy G., Graziella S., and Frances G. all kept eyes on the site through January. The only open burrows were ones in mid-field underneath the prickly pear cactus, burrows we knew belonged to the rats and mice. Graziella finally spotted a lone prairie dog on February 18. When C. Rex, Mike T., and Margaret D. went out on March 3, they flushed the 15 burrows they found open and caught a squirrel and a rat, but no prairie dog. Through March, C. Rex, Mike, and Frances continued to visit the site, flushing and covering the burrows at least once a week. Mike finally caught two prairie dogs on March 7. C. Rex subsequently caught two more rats and a female prairie dog, which expressed her displeasure by biting him.

When C. Rex and Frances showed up to flush on April Fools' Day, there were construction dumpsters on the site; so they knew this was their last shot to effect a rescue. The only open burrows they found likely belonged to rats. There were several holes in the middle of a large cluster of bushes. C. Rex and Frances could barely reach far enough through the prickly leaves with the hose and nets, and with multiple exits, the rat easily evaded capture. At the other end of the field, they found an open burrow at the base of a chollo cactus next to the cinder block wall that separated the field from a row of houses. C. Rex flushed the resident rodent, a rat that knew that chollo cactus like the back of its paw. As Frances tried to snag it with her net, the rat ran up... then down... then under a discarded beer box... and back up again. Frances missed it by a split second when it leapt to the wall and scurried over the top into an adjacent backyard.

C. Rex and Frances felt confident that all the prairie dogs had been captured, but there were at least two rats and doubtless countless mice still living on the field. Fortunately, they would likely be more willing than a prairie dog to find themselves new homes when the construction started. Still, Frances worried that the rodents driven into the surrounding neighborhood would cause people to call pest control, so she created and distributed a flier to the nearby houses telling residents to call PDP if they saw rodents or fresh burrows in their yard.

The only wildlife left to worry about at the site was a roadrunner family that lived in the trees between the field and the Valero station. We had previously thought that the construction might

not affect them, but it soon became apparent that it would. C. Rex advised the developer that, because roadrunners are a protected species, they were not allowed to disturb the nest until all the chicks had left it. The workers left the tree intact, but the activity going on at the cement mixer below kept the roadrunner mom in a constant state of agitation as she tried to feed her chicks. One day Frances saw her nervously pacing back and forth on the pavement with an insect in her beak, wanting desperately to reach her chicks that waited in the nest with open mouths. After the workers found the nest empty one morning they removed the last tree. We do hope that all the chicks survived.



We commend Fair and Square Builders for providing for the humane relocation of wildlife prior to construction. We only wish that more developers would show such respect for the native animals they displace. ❖

We Dig Prairie Dogs

One fine spring morning, C. Rex had finished his chores and was sitting down to peruse the paper and enjoy a fine “cuppa Joe.” Normally he would have let an early morning call go to voice mail, but since it was prairie dog season, he dutifully answered. On the line was a distressed homeowner from the Four Hills neighborhood who said that she had spotted a prairie dog at her front door the night before and fed it. In the morning, she found a fresh burrow beside the door. C. Rex was somewhat dubious whether the intruder was actually a prairie dog since we’ve not seen them in that area in the past. There are some prairie dogs along Route 66, but this address was at least a mile from there. Prairie dog or not, the animal needed help getting back to proper habitat, so C. Rex loaded up the Suburban with a kennel, gloves, and assorted implements and headed south.

Arriving at the home, C. Rex could see that an animal was indeed engaged in building its burrow next to the lady’s front door. A cone of loose dirt was increasing in size as he watched. He concluded that flushing would not be the best approach to capture it, but he did not want to use a shovel either, for fear of injuring the animal. He started digging at the mouth of the burrow by hand. The animal, alerted to the digging behind it, accelerated its effort, sending dirt a foot up into the air. It became a battle of wits—and speed! Not to be thwarted, C. Rex started digging a second tunnel which intersected with the critter’s tunnel about 12 inches down. He stuck his gloved hand down the tunnel, and seconds later, pulled out a very irritated female prairie dog, covered in dirt and kicking vigorously.

C. Rex, victorious, dusted off his vanquished opponent and placed her in a kennel, as the homeowner stood by amazed by the drama that had unfolded before her. Careful to leave things as he found them, C. Rex shoveled the dirt back into the hole and swept the walk before leaving. Driving back to the staging facility, he pondered how his passenger had found her way to Four Hills. Maybe having been chased from her home, she ran along the Tijeras Arroyo until she became lost. Alone and bewildered in the human environs, she decided to take respite where someone offered her food. After a brief stint in our staging facility, she was relocated to the Sevilleta NWR, where she would have the opportunity to join a new coterie. ❖

New Bunnies in the Family

In early April, Debbie S., one of PDP's newest volunteers, alerted us to the plight of two domestic house rabbits running loose in a neighborhood she frequented. Neighbors were becoming increasingly irate over the damage to their carefully tended gardens, but no warnings seemed to budge the bunnies' owners from their neglect...that is, until such time as the sweet pair was threatened with harm.

Years ago, Yvonne B. had adopted a female domestic rabbit when it was just a little kit. Volunteers from the House Rabbit Society (HRS) and a few from PDP had joined city officials to rescue over 100 rabbits from a hoarding situation. PDP hosted 20 of the rabbits in our staging facility until they could be flown to California, where an HRS chapter would find them forever homes. There were adults and juveniles from various family groups and one little black kit that was smaller than all the rest and seemed lost and alone. Yvonne took the little one into the house where she could care for it in a calmer environment. She tried not to get attached, even going so far as to call it Not My Bunny. The strategy didn't work—Yvonne succumbed to the rabbit's charms and named her Blackberry Bright Eyes.

Over nine years, Blackberry Bright Eyes shared a spacious, sunny room with her makeshift family of rescued critters, including prairie dogs and a rambunctious squirrel. Yvonne often wondered if Blackberry missed the company of her own kind. Blackberry has seemed somewhat subdued in recent years, perhaps just showing her age. Would adopting two new bunnies perk up the old gal, or would she resent sharing her food dish? Because the two bunnies were in harm's way, Yvonne decided that it was best to take them in and see how things went.

When the two bunnies arrived, the first order of business was to determine their sexes to ensure that the commingled family did not produce any surprise new additions. Yvonne was fortunate to know someone with the skill to provide the necessary biological assessment. Whew!—they were both girls. Next she thought about what to name them. Yvonne had named Blackberry Bright Eyes after one of the characters in the wonderful book *Watership Down* by Richard Adams. When he died on December 16, 2016, she had proclaimed that any rabbits she rescued in the future would also be named after characters in the book to honor Adams' memory. Who knew that the chance to do so would come so soon? She named the caramel colored rabbit Butterbur and the white one with Dalmatian spots Boxwood.

So how did Blackberry take to her new companions? Her eyes haven't been this bright in years—she's a new rabbit! All three bunnies spend their days loping around the room, tussling with each other and the prairie dogs over long blades of hay and periodically turning cardboard boxes into confetti—you know, just because... ❖

A Chain of Angels

On Friday, May 12, Regina M. and her daughter Alexis were exiting the Terrace Grove Cemetery in Belen when they saw what, at first glance, seemed to be a leaf tumbling down the road. As they gazed upon it, they soon discerned that it was, in fact, a tiny prairie dog pup crawling across the pavement. Regina quickly turned her car around and pulled over near the bewildered pup. She managed to scoop it into a towel just before it skittered under her car. There was no sign of its mother or siblings or, for that matter, any prairie dogs nearby. How could this poor baby have come to be in the middle of that road all alone? Alexis held the swaddled pup while her mother drove to Pet ER in Los Lunas, where a compassionate veterinarian administered the necessary first aid. Because the clinic's mission is limited to domestic animals, the staff recommended that the ladies reach out to a wildlife rescue organization for further help.

Regina and Alexis resolved to do whatever was necessary to save the little male pup. They contacted Wildlife Rescue, got instructions on syringe-feeding, and made a stop for puppy formula before what would surely be a long, anxious night. They managed to keep the pup alive through the night and, with mixed emotions, surrendered him to the rescue group the next day, hoping that experienced rehabbers could keep him going. Wildlife Rescue is an outstanding organization with which PDP has had the privilege of collaborating for many years, and Chery P. and Carol R. are two of its dedicated rehabbers. Chery called to give us a head's up—Carol would care for the pup over Saturday night and then transfer him to us on Sunday for long-term care.



Yvonne B. began the nerve-wracking task of syringe-feeding the frightened tiny pup. His weight on in-take was only 95 grams. Once he realized the syringe contained food, he reached for it vigorously at each feeding. Still, his weight barely budged, and he was not passing anything at all. Perhaps in the time he'd spent alone, separated from his mother, malnutrition and dehydration had taken their toll and affected his organs beyond the point that he would be able to recover. A trip to the vet and a course of probiotics cleared up the little guy's

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Editor's Note: This year the New Mexico Department of Transportation contracted with PDP to humanely relocate prairie dogs from the sites surrounding the intersection of Indian School Rd. and Tramway Blvd. The following story about the project was written for their department newsletter, "Que Pasa," and is reprinted here with permission.

D3 Humanely Relocates Prairie Dogs

Story by Gwyneth Duncan



District Three leads prairie dogs relocation project.

Whether you consider them to be a keystone species (a species on which others in an ecosystem depend) or just plain varmints, prairie dogs are part of our roadside environment. Once plentiful across the west, their numbers continue to decline due to loss of natural habitat. Historically, prairie dogs resided in regions grazed by bison, pronghorn, elk, and deer, but as humans continue to encroach on their natural habitats, they have become vulnerable to disease and starvation. Urban development, poisoning, shooting, and overgrazing of livestock have reduced their species population by about 98% over the past two hundred years. But thanks to District Three Maintenance, particularly Tom Kratochvil and Penny Gazvoda and the support of District Three Engineer Ken Murphy, some Albuquerque prairie dogs have been given a second chance when moved from an isolated urban environment to a natural setting at the Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge.

The City of Albuquerque had approached District Three with plans for landscaping at the intersection of Tramway (N.M. 556) and Indian School Road. The intersection has long been occupied by Gunnison's prairie dogs and any landscaping plan would surely be thwarted by the prairie dogs given the lack of natural vegetation to sustain them. This isolated community of prairie dogs had become reliant on food provided by local residents, and while some people enjoy feeding them, others consider them to be a nuisance. However, most local residents agreed that the prairie dogs would need to be removed if the landscaping plan was going to take root. Prairie dogs can also be a safety hazard for motorists if drivers swerve to avoid them.

District Three entered into an agreement with Prairie Dog Pals, a local non-profit organization dedicated to preserving dogs and

their natural environments, to humanely flush out and trap the prairie dogs. Their all-volunteer staff is experienced in capturing prairie dogs through "flushing," a method whereby a combination of soap and water is pumped into the burrows. This simulates a flash flood and forces the prairie dogs to come to the surface where they are caught with a net, wiped down, their eyes rinsed with a saline solution, and then placed in carriers for transport to a holding facility. They stay at the holding facility for a week or two before being released. Capturing takes place once the young are born and have surfaced, but the juveniles and adults must be healthy and of a certain weight before being released. When given a clean bill of health, they are "processed out" a day or two before release, which involves weighing, sexing, and even micro chipping.

Fortunately for both the NMDOT and Prairie Dog Pals, the US Fish and Wildlife Service allowed the prairie dogs to be released at the Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge as part of a reintroduction program. A condition for release on the Refuge is that the prairie dogs have to be micro chipped, which allows the Fish and Wildlife Service to identify individual prairie dogs and study the colonies in the future.

The release began at 4 a.m. when the prairie dogs were taken from their holding tanks, placed in carriers containing Timothy hay and driven to the Refuge. Their new home was an abandoned prairie dog town, which saved the Refuge and Prairie Dog Pals from digging "starter" burrows. Two to three prairie dogs were placed head first into the burrow followed by a handful of carrots and grain and then a bit of hay stuffed into the entrance. If not pointed into the burrow, they might take off running across open land. Only two prairie dogs were runners that day, but hopefully were called back to their colony through a variety of complex and sophisticated barks once we were gone. Having been confined to an urban intersection and subsisting on handouts, nearly 190 prairie dogs are now living on the Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge. Prairie dog colonies have been linked to grassland ecosystem health, and now these prairie dogs can do what they were meant to do, which is provide food and shelter to other wildlife while fertilizing and aerating the soils.

The humane capture and release of the Tramway and Indian School prairie dogs is a successful collaboration between NMDOT District Three (state agency), the US Fish and Wildlife Service (federal agency), and Prairie Dog Pals (private non-profit), and hopefully is a model for more successful relocation efforts. There are additional isolated prairie dog colonies in the District Three right of way that Prairie Dog Pals would like to remove at no cost to the NMDOT. This shows how environmental stewardship can result in cost savings and improved safety for the NMDOT. For more information about prairie dogs and the reintroduction program go to www.prairiedogpals.org and www.fws.gov/refuge/sevilleta.

intestinal problems, and he finally began to gain weight, giving Yvonne hope that he could be released. As young as he was, she'd first have to integrate him into a family group, and there were plenty in the staging facility that were awaiting release.

Yvonne placed the young male in a singleton cage next to one that held a relatively calm group of prairie dogs. The little pup flew into a panic and began barking incessantly. She thought that, given some time, he would calm down and begin a communicative exchange with his neighbors, and after an appropriate interval she would be able to merge him with the group. At 1:30 A.M., long after "lights out" for the day, Yvonne checked the staging facility, hoping that the pup would have grown tired and fallen off to sleep. To her dismay, the little guy was still barking non-stop. With apprehension, she checked in again at 6:30 A.M. With one look the story was clear—dozens of restless and bleary-eyed prairie dogs glared at her from their cages, some clinging to the wire sides in agitation. The little pup was still barking! Had he barked all night long? Yvonne opened the door of the singleton cage. The young male darted from the cage, scrambled up her chest, and curled up tightly underneath her chin. He was so very young when he had been separated from his mother, and Yvonne had filled that void during the time it had taken to restore his health. No amount of time in the staging facility with other prairie dogs seemed to soothe him, so Yvonne returned him to the house for individual care.

A chain of guardian angels was responsible for this little pup's rescue and recovery, each one along the way giving generously of her time to provide the care needed to sustain him. What an incredible world we could create if all vulnerable people and creatures were embraced by so many loving, helping hands.

Postscript: In both human and veterinary medicine, the term "failure to thrive" refers to insufficient weight gain or inappropriate weight loss. Half of prairie dog pups in the wild do not survive through the first year. We try to get these compromised pups to a proper weight by augmenting their diet so that they can be released. If they survive, they will eventually reach a normal weight, but sometimes not until after the last release of the season. If that's the case, we can offer these pups that would have died in the wild a comfortable life as one of our spokesrodents, and they will be loved dearly.

Near the end of our season this year, another "failure to thrive" pup arrived in the staging facility. Despite our efforts, it still only weighed 250 grams when it was time for the last release, nowhere near the minimum 350 grams required for release. Not wanting the little one to be alone, Yvonne considered whether the male that had been rescued by Regina and Alexis in Belen might accept this little one as a companion. In Yvonne's care, the Belen boy had thrived and developed a robust physique; he was easily three times the size of the new little pup. Consequently, it was with some apprehension that she introduced the two. The next day she was concerned when she didn't see the pup anywhere in the cage. Had he eaten the little fellow? Just then, a little nose appeared. The pup had burrowed under his new big brother for safety and comfort. We're happy to report that an experienced foster, who devotes generous time and attention to soothing traumatized rescues, has agreed to adopt the odd-sized pair. ❖

Editor's Note: *While we recognize that prairie dogs do play an important role in the grassland ecosystem, what they are most "meant to do," first and foremost, is to enjoy life—for their lives are of value for their own sake, not merely for what they can provide to others.*

A Shared Loss

The colonies north and south of Indian School Rd. at Tramway Blvd. had long been popular sites for prairie dog lovers to view this native wildlife. Unfortunately, we were unable to convince the city and the New Mexico Department of Transportation to turn the area into a park for that purpose. In July, during the peak of our rescue season, we started fielding calls from folks dismayed over the disappearance of the prairie dogs.

Jason G., who had been stationed in Albuquerque while in the Air Force, returned with his young family to visit all their old haunts. One of their favorite stops was the lively prairie dog colony on Indian School Rd. Imagine their dismay when they found the site once animated with the diverse interactions of family groups now eerily quiet and still? Yvonne B. could hear the anxiety in Jason's voice as he asked about the colony's fate. She was glad to reassure him that the prairie dogs had been relocated to wild habitat, but realized that she could expect many such calls in the future as other past residents return to find that the once thriving colony of generationally socialized prairie dogs is gone.

The second call was from Chris M., a long time resident of Albuquerque who had relocated to Arizona in May. Through the years, it was his custom to visit the Indian School site regularly to enjoy the antics of the prairie dogs there. Yvonne remembered him because he had called a number of times over the years to ask questions about prairie dogs or share information about a specific colony. Yvonne sympathized with him when he admitted that he was having prairie dog withdrawal. She was happy to put him in touch with people who knew where he could get a prairie-dog-watching-fix in his new locale. Sad to say, this might be harder and harder to provide in the coming years. ❖

A Tale of Two Priscillas

In the middle of June, Priscilla T. was making her way down Tramway Blvd., colony by colony. She arrived at the last one just north of Central Ave. in time to witness a tragic but not uncommon sight. Several prairie dogs lay dead in the road, the result of a "domino effect" that can occur when food tossed from a car window doesn't quite make it beyond the gutter. If one prairie dog is hit by a car, others trying to retrieve the dead or injured one from the road can end up suffering the same fate. Some of PDP's most stalwart volunteers take it upon themselves to remove dead prairie dogs from the road because they know it can save the lives of others. It is a perfectly horrible but incredibly generous chore. As Priscilla was lifting the body of a prairie dog that appeared lifeless, she felt it stir—just barely—in her hands. She immediately called Yvonne B., hoping that she would be able to render some life-saving first aid.

When Priscilla arrived at the staging facility with the barely conscious prairie dog, Yvonne wasn't very hopeful. It was a female that appeared to have given birth to pups during the season. Yvonne could find no obvious wound or damage, but she

thought to herself, “When you don’t need gloves to complete an exam, it may be too late.” Nevertheless, Yvonne administered water with a syringe, a few drops at a time. After some minutes, the prairie dog seemed to rouse ever so slightly. Yvonne and Priscilla left the prairie dog in a singleton cage with plenty of food and fresh hay, and then called Southwest Veterinary Medical Center for the earliest appointment. Our outstanding veterinarian, Dr. Daniel Levenson, examined the female prairie dog and determined that she had no broken bones or internal bleeding. Maybe she had only received a glancing blow and been tossed across the pavement. Once it seemed likely that the prairie dog would survive, we named her Priscilla, in honor of the wonderful volunteer who had saved her life. She would have plenty of time to recover given that the next release was weeks away.

Despite the positive prognosis, Priscilla never seemed to be quite okay. In the staging facility, we provide short pieces of plastic tubing in the tanks and cages to give the prairie dogs hiding places. If you disturb one who’s chilling in a tube, they will either make a quick escape or bark loudly at you. Priscilla curled up in a tube and never seemed to leave it. When Yvonne would check to see how she was doing, Priscilla didn’t run or make a sound—she just lay listless in the tube. The best way that Yvonne could think of to describe it is that Priscilla seemed “shut down.” Could it be that some of the prairie dogs found on the road that day were some of her close kin, possibly even some of her pups? Maybe she was grieving, or worse yet, maybe she had suffered brain damage from being hit by the car. We’ll never know.

A month and a half went by. Feeling that Priscilla might never regain the sharpness necessary to elude a predator in the wild, Yvonne contacted Denise S., a wonderful guardian in Santa Fe who has fostered many compromised prairie dogs. After coming to the staging facility to see Priscilla for herself, Denise agreed with Yvonne—although there was nothing technically “wrong” with this prairie dog, she just didn’t seem “whole.” Priscilla had made her biological contribution by raising pups; now she is living out her life in a safe and loving home with Denise. ❖

Tank You Very Much!

The most prairies dogs we’ve had in our staging facility at one time is about 450. There were prairie dogs from wall to wall and floor to ceiling. Between cleaning tanks and feeding, it took nearly four hours a day to tend to that many! We do not wish to be in that max capacity situation again; so when occupancy at the “Inn of the Prairie Dogs” reaches 250 boarders, it is time for a release.

Fortunately, we can to some extent control the flow in and out, but there are limiting factors. We have a finite number of livestock tanks and cages in which to board the prairie dogs and a finite number of kennels in which to move them to the refuge. Another consideration is that different coteries (prairie dogs from different sites) require separation to prevent conflict. If we get prairie dogs from a lot of different sites at one time, then the inn may not be at full capacity, even though all the rooms (tanks) and beds (cages) are taken. Toward the end of July, C. Rex found himself running out of tank space. PDP has 15 livestock tanks and 20 or so cages and they were all in use. While every prairie dog had a place to lay its furry little head, there was still a problem for the innkeepers.

Here’s where the metaphor breaks down a bit—our inn needs extra rooms (tanks) for check-out, i.e. processing prairie dogs for release. Each prairie dog must be checked for health problems, sexed, weighed, and micro-chipped, and the data recorded for use in future studies by Sevilleta NWR staff. Because prairie dogs pretty much all look alike (to us humans anyway), you can’t process a prairie dog then put it back into the tank from which it came. The only way to be sure that each prairie dog is processed is to move them one by one to a fresh tank as the deed is done. After a tank is emptied, we clean the soiled hay out, add fresh hay, and use it as the receiving tank for the next group. The only caveat is that a receiving tank must be the same size or larger than the one from which the prairie dogs are removed. You can’t put 20 prairie dogs into a 10-prairie dog tank because overcrowding could lead to fights. In a perfect scenario, we could get by with one spare large tank if we started with the largest tank and worked our way down by size; but we try to process all prairie dogs from a site consecutively, and sometimes they are in several tanks of different sizes. We needed a couple of extra tanks.

So...C. Rex, not really expecting anything to come of it, sent an email out to our volunteers asking if anybody had a couple of livestock tanks we could borrow. After all, why would anyone, save a rancher, have a few spare livestock tanks lying around? Lo and behold, Linda D. responded that, yes, as a matter of fact she did! It turned out that she was in the process of converting her yard to a self-sustaining permaculture and had acquired the tanks from Walkin’ in Circles Ranch to implement part of her plan. Ah, what serendipity! Linda saved the day by loaning us the tanks. In return, we loaned her our tank lids (custom-made by C. Rex) so that she could strain her dirt before adding it to her tanks. There was also a life lesson here for C. Rex—it doesn’t hurt to ask. ❖

Who Says Trapping Is Boring?

It was the middle of August, and Mike T. was expecting to spend a few quiet hours trapping at the corner of Tramway Blvd. and Cloudview Ave. He set out all his traps and then found a nice shady spot in which to sit across the street, where he had full view of all the traps. Through his binoculars, he watched a prairie dog cautiously edging into a trap. Suddenly there was a loud sound, and the prairie dog darted down a nearby burrow. A car had careened around the corner, jumped the curb, run over two traps, and knocked down a utility pole. Only a few minutes earlier Mike had been standing in that spot. Thank goodness that neither he nor the prairie dogs were in the path of that vehicle! The police showed up and interviewed Mike as a witness. Though shaken by the accident, he decided to continue trapping. Only a few prairie dogs ventured above ground following the ruckus, so Mike was only able to capture two.



The driver was not injured, but our trap did not survive. ❖

Toothless But Not Homeless

While in-processing the two prairie dogs he'd trapped at Cloudview, Mike T. performed the required health checks and discovered that the adult female had ram's horn teeth. A prairie dog's incisor teeth are constantly growing, but the action of snipping grass keeps them well-trimmed. If, for whatever reason, the upper and lower incisors do not meet, one or more can continue to grow unchecked. The curve of the over-grown teeth resembles a ram's horn—thus the name. A prairie dog with the condition would still be able to forage for awhile, though less effectively, using other teeth. It is a very serious condition though, as the prairie dog will eventually die of malnutrition or from infection when the teeth grow back into the head.

The female prairie dog's top incisors were already one inch long and curved back into her mouth. Yvonne B. and C. Rex trimmed the upper teeth, but there did not seem to be anything on the bottom but a single short crooked stump of a tooth. Without lower incisors, this prairie dog was not releasable. At the time, C. Rex posted this on Facebook:

I regret every time that we have not documented the condition by taking a photo before trimming (for education purposes), but when we find one in this condition, I am always in a rush to alleviate it RIGHT AWAY! This poor doggie was in serious danger. Imagine how traumatic it would be if a walrus's tusks were growing down its throat. [The prairie dog] was very stoic about the whole thing.

Jim T. volunteered to take the prairie dog to see our vet at Southwest Veterinary Medical Center. Dr. Levenson found that she had no lower left incisor, and the right lower incisor was diseased. It was turned perpendicular to the normal orientation, had very thin enamel, and its core was black. Dr. Levenson trimmed the top teeth, and on a subsequent visit removed all three. The prairie dog will be fine because Jim has offered her a home for life. He calls her Toothy II because she is the second prairie dog that he has fostered due to ram's horn teeth. Toothy had a sense from the start that Jim would be her caregiver, for she let him pet her the very night he brought her home.



Toothy II, now happy and healthy ❖

We cannot win this battle to save species and environments without forging an emotional bond between ourselves and nature as well—for we will not fight to save what we do not love.

—Stephen Jay Gould (1941-2002)
Paleontologist and Evolutionary Biologist

Macy

While feeding in the staging facility toward the end of August, C. Rex noticed a male prairie dog in one of the tanks that looked emaciated. He was surprised because the group in that tank had come in only a week before from Phil Chacon Park, and all of them were of seemingly healthy weight at the time. Jim was already going to take a female with ram's horn teeth to the vet on August 24, so he offered to take the male in, as well. The prairie dog showed no obvious sign of causative disease but had difficulty walking and weighed only 272 grams—he was in critical condition! Jim decided that he would give the poor fellow intensive care at home.

Macy, as Jim started calling him, was not eating on his own or passing anything. Jim's first order of business was to make sure that the prairie dog was well hydrated. He gave him water with a syringe and then some Critical Care formula mixed with sweet potato baby food and thinned with Pedialyte. After a few days of receiving fluids,



Macy finally pooped. It was a sudden case of diarrhea, which unfortunately took place while Jim was holding him! What was more shocking was what else came out—a hollow piece of plastic, about 5/8" long and 1/8" in diameter. Because Macy had been captured from an area known for drug activity, Jim thought it might be a cap for a syringe.

Macy was still in bad shape. On August 30, Jim thought he was losing him. Macy lay limp in Jim's hands with his eyes open barely a slit. It was touch and go for the next few days, but Macy had the will to live and finally started eating on his own. After a 10-day course of probiotics prescribed by Dr. Levenson, Macy's scat returned to normal, and he started regaining some weight.

By September 18, Macy weighed 333 grams and 570 grams by October 20. Once he regained his stamina, Macy started exploring his surroundings and taking an interest in Toothy, the female prairie dog Jim had taken in because of tooth issues. This was a challenging case for Jim, but he managed to save yet another prairie dog. ❖



Prairie Dogs Have Pals in Belen

Usually when PDP gets a call from someone asking us to remove prairie dogs, the petitioner, whether a lover or a hater, just wants us to solve their problem. Darleen A., a city councilor from Belen, was different. She took it upon herself to save a small colony of prairie dogs that resided on a lot behind the real estate agency for which she worked. She approached her bosses, Lorraine S. G. and Anthony G., who were also owners of the property, and got buy-in for the idea. Next she contacted PDP for help, but she didn't stop there. She wanted to be a part of the rescue, and she enlisted the help of her boyfriend, Reggie C., as well. Darleen, Reggie, Lorraine and Anthony, and Darleen's friends Regina and Gary E., who lived on the adjacent property, all made donations to fund the project.

It was a beautiful New Mexico morning in late August when C. Rex met up with Darleen and Reggie at the site. Though the weather cooperated, the prairie dogs did not, so it was a good thing that C. Rex had the extra help on hand. Darleen and Reggie got to witness—and catch—what C. Rex likes to call “ghost dogs.” As the foam cleared the top of a burrow without a prairie dog exiting, C. Rex methodically moved on to flush the next burrow. Often one of the wily little rodents waited until he was flushing the next burrow to poke its head out of the one he had just flushed! While Gunnison's prairie dogs usually only have a single access to their burrows, these enterprising Gunnies had multiple exits, giving them even more chances to evade capture. Standing by with nets at the ready, first-time rescuers Darleen and Reggie caught several ghost dogs on the lam!

The trio caught 11 prairie dogs that day, but there were at least that many more that had evaded capture. The prairie dogs that Darleen saw the following day seemed especially skittish, so she asked C. Rex to wait a few weeks before returning for another round of flushing. Her boss, Anthony, joined the crew the second time around, and the group caught another 10 prairie dogs. They didn't catch them all, but there's always next spring. Thanks to our “prairie dog pals” from Belen for instigating and seeing this rescue through! ❖

Exciting Times in Bernardo

New Mexico Game and Fish (NMG&F) maintains a number of wildlife conservation areas throughout the state, including the Ladd S. Gordon Waterfowl Complex near Bernardo. Nestled on flat land next to the Rio Grande, it consists of a wetland area and several fields where a wide range of crops are grown. Some of the crops, such as alfalfa, are grown to offset operating expenses, while others are planted to attract wildlife, especially migrating birds. Over the last few years, PDP has partnered with staff and volunteers from the Sevilleta NWR to remove prairie dogs from those fields. We've relocated several hundred prairie dogs so far, and received a contract from NMG&F again this year. Our team consisted of Ray W., Mike T., and C. Rex from PDP and intern Ashley R. and volunteer Jodi K., both from the Sevilleta NWR. Over the course of five days, they captured a total of 76 prairie dogs, which were then staged at the refuge prior to release. The crew varied from day to day, but Ashley was there flushing every day. Ashley regaled us with a play-by-play account of the exciting captures that she and Mike made on the last day.

“We had a couple of exciting events the on the last day of flushing at Bernardo. First, Mike and I were just finishing flushing the area we were in, but I wanted to get one last burrow hidden in some vegetation. We were both running our own hoses, but as this was the last burrow, Mike decided to stand nearby in case I caught a prairie dog. Now, this site lulled us into false expectations because we were only getting one prairie dog per burrow. So I was not expecting what happened next. Once the foam started rising in the burrow, out popped a prairie dog! So I captured this one, but as I was preparing to dry it off and put saline in its eyes, a second prairie dog popped out. I quickly grabbed this one, and had a prairie dog in each hand. Then, a third one popped out! So Mike came in to assist and caught the third one. We were both shocked and laughing because we were not expecting so many prairie dogs in the same burrow. Then, a fourth prairie dog popped out and caught both of us completely off guard, and it started running! So I yelled, “Mike get it!” So Mike (with a prairie dog in hand) started chasing the fourth prairie dog and caught it several feet away. We managed to hold onto all four prairie dogs and get them into the kennel for transport to the refuge!

Then later that day, we had another escape artist. As I am flushing, I hear Mike yell, “He's right behind you!” I turn around quickly to see a ghost dog running. I just found myself diving through the air toward the ghost dog. As I landed, I was able to get my hands on the ghost dog and prevent his escape! These crafty dogs added to our total count of 76 dogs from Bernardo!” ❖

Stretching Our Reach

It seems as if our sphere of influence is expanding. In addition to calls from the East Mountains and Santa Fe, we have gotten inquiries from Taos and as far south as Lemitar. Generally we try to limit our activities to Albuquerque and a few communities nearby to the south, such as Los Lunas and Bosque Farms; yet we responded to the call from Lemitar despite the distance and marshaling difficulties it entailed.

The call came from a rancher who wanted to have prairie dogs humanely removed from his land. Most ranchers hate prairie dogs and want them all eradicated. This enlightened fellow acknowledged that prairie dogs are part of the prairie ecosystem, and while not particularly welcome on his pastures, did not warrant destruction. His concern extended not only to his cattle, but also to creatures native to the land, many of which depend on prairie dogs. His positive attitude toward wildlife convinced us that we should help, even though the distance from Albuquerque would severely complicate the logistics.

Fortunately, our good friends at the Sevilleta NWR came to the rescue, and we were able to work out a collaborative effort that would use our equipment and their volunteers and interns to accomplish the relocation. C. Rex performed the site survey and identified approximately 60 burrows with a resident population of 25-35 prairie dogs. We had allotted five days for flushing, but the crew finished in three, capturing 23 prairie dogs. Follow-up trapping netted another four prairie dogs, bringing the total to 27. The prairie dogs were staged at the refuge and released with prairie dogs from Albuquerque. ❖

We can judge the heart of a man by his treatment of animals.

— Immanuel Kant

No Ordinary Singleton

Margaret D. usually kicks off our spring capture season with a singleton rescue; this year she closed our summer season with the last rescue of the year. It was almost time to suspend capture operations for the year when Yvonne B. received a call from a very nice lady named Keller L., who lived just south of Constitution Ave. and east of Wyoming Blvd. A prairie dog had somehow found its way into her yard and had dug a burrow next her driveway. We're always amazed when we hear reports of singletons so far away from the nearest colony.

When Margaret arrived at the residence, the prairie dog scooted down the burrow. She baited her trap with carrots and waited, but the prairie dog did not re-emerge. After an hour and a half, Margaret decided to pack up and try again the next day. On her second trip, she brought two traps and a wide variety of goodies with which to bait them—carrots, corn, romaine lettuce, and peanut butter. Surely, there would be something to tempt the little rodent. Margaret walked up to the burrow to set a trap on either side, and to her amazement, she got within two feet of the prairie dog before it darted down the burrow.

The prairie dog emerged about an hour later, and to Margaret's utter surprise, waddled right into one of the traps without the least bit of hesitation. When the trap door sprang shut, the prairie dog showed no reaction. That's actually not that uncommon; a lot of them are not distressed until they have finished chowing down on the bait and decide to leave but find no way out. They really get upset when the trapper approaches, which is why we always cover the trap with a towel before picking it up. THIS prairie dog seemed totally unconcerned as Margaret walked up to transfer it to a kennel. There was none of the usual agitated barking.

When Margaret arrived at the staging facility, she described to Yvonne the prairie dog's odd behavior. Yvonne examined the prairie dog, without even using gloves, and determined that it was a healthy female. The prairie dog, for her part, did not seem overly distressed at being handled. Yvonne prepared a singleton cage with plenty of hay and fresh food, and the new arrival immediately scooted under the hay.

Being taken from its burrow and placed in a cage or holding tank must be quite unsettling for a prairie dog. Those housed in groups take solace in each other, often sleeping together in one big pile. The various singletons we've hosted over the years have displayed a range of behaviors. Several years ago, there was a female singleton that curled into a tight ball under the hay and wouldn't eat, becoming emaciated in short order. We knew that she had lived alone for years in a burrow separate from any colony, and we later discovered that her vision was impaired by cataracts. With no other intervention except removal from the staging facility, she regained her appetite and soon flourished. We became sensitive to the possibility that singletons that have been separated from prairie dog society for some time may indeed be frightened by the cacophony of the many prairie dog "voices" that they hear in the staging facility.

The prairie dog that Margaret had brought in seemed distressed. When Yvonne checked on the female over the proceeding days, she acted rather subdued and didn't have much appetite, judging by the minimal amount of food disappearing from her dish.

While there may be other reasons for such behavior, we considered that she might be unused to the company of other prairie dogs. Her demeanor at the trap site and during in-processing caused us to think that she may even have been habituated to humans. The last release of the season was fast approaching, so a decision had to be made. Margaret adopted the prairie dog and named her Madeleine. It was apparently the right decision. Madeleine let Margaret pet her from the start and has never tried to bite. She squeaks when Margaret enters the room and stops as soon as she's given attention. ❖

The Great Taos Land Deal

PDP can accept a wide range of donations. Our obvious preference is cash; however, in kind donations are both common and appreciated. We can even accept cars, boats, airplanes, and anything else that can be converted to cash to benefit the prairie dogs. Thus, we were quite interested when one of our supporters offered a parcel of land near Taos "valued" at \$12,000!

Hans F., who lives in Ohio, is a long-time friend of C. Rex's. When he was visiting a couple of years ago, he helped out on one of our releases. If you've participated in a release, you know that it is not the easiest of tasks to carry kennels full of prairie dogs across uneven ground, dodging cacti and avoiding stepping into animal burrows. Though pushing 80 at the time, Hans was not satisfied to just watch the proceedings. He enthusiastically pitched right in ferrying kennels and feed out to the release spots.

Knowing that PDP is always on the lookout for land where prairie dogs can be resettled, Hans offered to donate to us a ¼-acre parcel of land that he owns, located about 18 miles from Taos. The size of the parcel made it unfeasible as a relocation site, but if it had market value, our finances could certainly benefit from the sale. Hans explained that he had won the property years before in a drawing he had entered at the 1962 World's Fair in Seattle. He had since contacted a real estate agent in New Mexico, who told him that the property was worth \$12,000 and that they would sell it for him if he paid them \$900 up front. Not born yesterday, Hans declined. Given the additional information, C. Rex was circumspect about accepting the donation. Our newest board member and legal advisor, Carolyn M., researched the history of the property and found quite a story.

An unscrupulous company had held "drawings" at various out-of-state events in which people could win land in New Mexico. "Winners" were notified that all they needed to do to claim their prize was to pay the company \$50 to have the deed recorded. The company had offered 10,000 lots through the bogus drawings. Its cost per acre was about \$3, which included the purchase price and recording fee, so the company raked in millions! Because the seller had used the U.S. mail to carry out the scheme, he was successfully prosecuted for mail fraud, despite being defended by F. Lee Bailey.

The land near Taos, called Tres Piedras Estates, was advertised as having aspens, easy to get water at 75 feet, and certain to have city services within a few years of 1962. In truth, it is a one mile square plot of flat saltbush land carved up into ¼-acre lots. Water is unavailable unless you drill 400-600 feet. There are no utilities (not even electricity), and it is illegal to put a septic tank

on less than ¾ of an acre. Of the 10,000 lots sold, there are currently about 38 buildings—mostly shacks with pit toilets. See pictures of existing structures at: <http://trespiedrasestates.com>.

Carolyn's assessment was that the likelihood of Hans' property being worth much in the foreseeable future is near zero. The titles are uninsurable, so both banks and local real estate agents will not touch the property. Thousands of the lots have been auctioned by the tax folks. There are websites that offer lots for sale, but generally the only buyers interested are those seeking to pull together enough contiguous lots to be able to build. Carolyn noted that the company had done the same thing with Rio Grande Estates outside of Belen, NM (not far from the Sevilleta NWR). She also looked into the real estate company that had told Hans they would sell the property for an up-front commission. It too is a scam operation. The company is not a licensed real estate agency, had been in existence for only a year, and has numerous complaints against it through the Better Business Bureau. The address it provides belongs to some un-leased office space.

Thanks to Carolyn we dodged a situation that would have given us more grief than benefit. What remains of value to us is the support of our friend Hans! ❖

Outreach 2017

Jim T., now officially a member of PDP's board as Outreach Coordinator, was as hard at work this year as ever. His first request came from Sarah C., who represented a home school co-op in Rio Rancho with students ranging from grades K-12. She said that Jim had done a presentation for them in years past and the kids had loved it. On January 12, Jim gave two presentations of his "Prairie Dogs in Peril" lecture to a total of 45 students. Of course, what the kids really loved was seeing Snuggles, Jim's foster black-tailed prairie dog, who served as an ambassador for her species, a "spokesrodent," so to speak.

The Whitfield Wildlife Conservation Area, near Belen and Tome, is a cooperative project of the Valencia Soil and Water Conservation District. With volunteers and other local, state, and national agencies, the district seeks to protect, restore, and enhance wetlands in the Middle Rio Grande Bosque. Their efforts include education programs and wetland wildlife conservation. They invited staff from the Sevilleta NWR and PDP to give a joint presentation on prairie dogs at their annual meeting on April 1. Jim partnered with Jeannine K. to give a shared 15 minute talk to 65 attendees. Snuggles served as spokesrodent for the event.

On June 13, Jim presented his "Prairie Dogs in Peril" lecture to 45 campers and five adults in the Kamp Rio summer camp program at Rio Rancho's Cabezon Community Center. The presentation was enthusiastically received by all. Jim's foster black-tailed prairie dog, Prairie, was outstanding in her first ever spokesrodent appearance!

The Unitarian Universalist Westside Congregation in Rio Rancho held an animal ministry outreach event on Saturday, June 24. The event featured a vaccination clinic and booths manned by animal care and rescue organizations. They invited PDP to participate to help educate the public about prairie dogs—which is, of course, one of our favorite things to do! Jim and Carolyn M. tabled along

with Prairie on her second outing as a spokesrodent. It was the congregation's first attempt at such an event, and it was stellar!

Brittney V., a park ranger at the Valles Caldera National Preserve near Jemez Springs, invited PDP to participate in their Birthday Bash celebration on July 22. Brittney was the organizer for the event, and her stated goal was to diversify the organizations represented. She hoped "to celebrate all of the reasons why the preserve is special, whether in terms of culture, environmental policy, landscape restoration, acoustics, as a wildlife corridor, a pollinator refuge, or even as a mecca for prairie dog research"—which is why she invited our organization. Jim, Paul P., and Prairie manned PDP's table. Though surrounded by a colony of wild Gunnison's, black-tailed spokesrodent Prairie was ever the professional, charming almost 600 visitors that day.

Park Ranger Brittney was evidently impressed by our showing at the Birthday Bash because she invited us back for Valles Caldera's Elk Festival on September 30. Good ole dependable Jim and his trusty side kick, Prairie, represented PDP along with Ray W. Unfortunately, they got rained out after a couple of hours. Regardless, it was a super event while it lasted.

Next, PDP was invited to table at the Celebrate New Mexico's National Wildlife Refuges Press Conference on October 12. The press conference would kick off a two-day celebration at New Mexico's newest wildlife refuge, Valle de Oro NWR. The goal of the event was to celebrate National Wildlife Refuge Week, highlight the amazing opportunities we have to visit national wildlife refuges and public lands in New Mexico, and honor the 20th anniversary of the Refuge System Improvement Act. Jim, Margaret D., Becky D., and Prairie represented PDP at this important event. In addition to the public, attendees included representatives from each of New Mexico's nine wildlife refuges, members of the press, and public figures, such as state Senator Michael Padilla and Joy Blackwood, Urban Wildlife Refuge Program Director for the National Wildlife Refuge Association. Jim and Becky took the opportunity to bend Ms. Blackwood's ear on the plight of prairie dogs. After the press conference, the celebration offered networking opportunities, tours, hikes, and an opportunity to stay the night at Sevilleta NWR. Margaret even got to participate in a monarch butterfly release.

Celebrate Sevilleta! Is a terrific opportunity to experience New Mexico's largest and most ecologically diverse wildlife refuge. The annual event offers tours, hikes, educational talks, intriguing demonstrations and exhibits, hands-on activities, music, food, and more! Jim, Yvonne B., and C. Rex tabled at this year's celebration on October 21. Jim's foster Gunnison's prairie dog Toothy II made her debut as a spokesrodent. As part of the day's "10-minute talk" educational lectures, C. Rex provided a scholarly though somewhat bawdy presentation on the mating habits of Gunnison's prairie dogs, titled "Sex about Town" (or alternately "Sirens and Studs of the Sevilleta"). PDP's table, and especially Toothy, attracted lots of visitors. Except for the wind lifting our canopy off the ground late in the afternoon, it was a perfect day!

Bosque Del Apache NWR, south of Socorro, provides vital winter habitat for thousands of waterfowl, especially sandhill cranes. To celebrate the return of the cranes each year, the refuge hosts the Festival of the Cranes, a 6-day event popular with birders and wildlife photographers from around the nation. This

year was the festival's 30th anniversary. Jim and Carolyn tabled on Saturday, November 18. It was a long day for Jim and spokesrodent Prairie, who had to leave home before dawn and did not return until after sunset. Though their table was set up under a tent, conditions were challenging throughout the day. The wind whipped at the sides of the tent, sometimes drowning out their conversations with visitors. By the end of the day everything was covered in dust! Despite the challenges, it was a productive day. They talked with hundreds of people, sold several plush prairie dogs and canvas totes, and got lots of donations. Carolyn even connected with a lady interested in joining PDP.

A contact Jim made at Celebrate Seville! led to an invite to present his "Prairie Dogs in Peril" lecture at Cottonwood Montessori School in Corrales on November 20. The teacher was excited to have Jim speak because the students were in the process of studying North America and the desert biome. His audience included 31 students from grades 1-3 and four adults. Of course, Prairie was the highlight of the presentation. She's becoming quite the pro at this spokesrodent thing!

On November 26, Jim and all three of his foster prairie dogs made the trek to the Las Vegas NWR. He gave two back-to-back presentations to a total of 42 people. It was the first and second outreach events, respectively, for his two Gunnison's prairie dogs, Macy and Toothy II. Macy was alert and curious about the affair, but Toothy was quite shy. As usual, his black-tail, Prairie, was the "belle of the ball." At one point she worked her way through a blanket and stood up looking like she was trying on a dress, evoking laughter from the crowd. Ah, Jim, upstaged once again by a 2-pound rodent! ❖

Serendipitous Connections

Jane L. is one of the many wonderful advocates and supporters that PDP has come to rely upon over the years. She has been a "pal" of prairie dogs for over a decade, offering resources and encouraging our efforts year after year. She called in the spring to let us know that she was in the process of "downsizing" her life and intended to donate a diverse collection of collectibles and treasures to PDP. During the rescue season, we talked to her often, primarily to be certain that her family members would not be overlooked in her generosity to us. This was especially important because her endowment included gold jewelry. Jane assured us that all donations would be vetted with her family first.

As the date of our annual garage sale approached, C. Rex and Yvonne made multiple trips to collect Jane's donations. During one trip, Jane told Yvonne the story of how she had become acquainted with our organization through a chance interaction with a city bus driver over 10 year ago. She rode the bus on a regular basis, particularly the route which included Tramway Blvd. She was fascinated by the thriving colony of prairie dogs at the end of the route and commented as much to the bus driver. Surprisingly, he handed Jane one of PDP's brochures. That serendipitous interaction launched a decade long relationship!

When Yvonne recounted Jane's story to C. Rex, his head snapped around in surprise...then he said that he knew exactly who that bus driver was! He recalled an interaction of his own from 10 years ago. He was flushing prairie dogs next to the James Joseph

Dwyer Memorial Police Substation when he was accosted by a city bus driver. During his break, the driver saw our tanker truck on the site and ran up the hill from the bus turn-around area below to make sure that no harm was being inflicted on the prairie dogs. C. Rex's response was met with skepticism until he handed the man a couple of PDP's brochures. As Paul Harvey would have said, "Now you know the rest of the story." ❖

Annual Garage Sale



As we head toward the end of our summer relocation season, we start planning for our annual garage sale. In the past, the Weems International Artfest was generally our biggest fundraising event of the year. Since its closing in 2014, we have had to depend more and more on our annual garage sale. Fortunately, we have great supporters, who donated a wide variety of goods for this year's garage sale. Our volunteers sorted the largesse, setting aside high value items for special handling. Mikki R. contributed a dryer and kitchen nook table and benches, and Jane L. donated furniture, electronics, and even gold jewelry. C. Rex and Yvonne B. spent a pleasant afternoon at Albuquerque Gold and Silver, conducting a transaction that "primed the pump" on our sales quite nicely.

The date was set for September 23. It had rained heavily in the preceding days, and the weather, while promising, still threatened to disrupt our enterprise. The crew started setting up at 6:30 A.M. and got sprinkled on a few times before they opened at 8:00 A.M. Ray W., Tania S.W., Ella W., Cassidy B., Margaret D., Phil C., Margaret D., Graziella S., Yvonne B., and C. Rex manned the tables, promoted sales, closed deals, etc. Foot traffic was lighter than in the past. Perhaps the weather had deterred would-be shoppers. We had a lot of merchandise left over at the end, but Debbie saved the day by volunteering to host a 3-day garage sale with the remaining items.

The follow-up garage sale was scheduled to take place October 5-7. Unfortunately, a huge front was moving in, so we decided to skip the first day's sale. It was a good thing that we did because there were scattered showers throughout the day. We opened bright and early on Friday morning and had a steady stream of customers that day and the next. A number of our supporters dropped off additional items, making the sale an even bigger success. Thanks to the concurrence of the Balloon Fiesta, we were treated to a balloon flyover on Friday morning.

The three days of garage sales, plus transactions completed before and after, brought in over \$1700. While it required a lot of work, the money earned will be a big help in funding our programs in 2018! Thanks to all of you whose donations made this our most successful garage sale to date! ❖

Prairie Dog Advocates Find Love

By Yvonne Boudreaux

PDP's 2017 summer relocation season was bracketed by two weddings within our network of prairie dog advocates. Ten years ago, we met three individuals whose devotion to prairie dogs became the basis for lasting friendships and fruitful collaborations. All three of these individuals got married this year, two of them to each other.

In 2007, we met two biologists, Paul E. and Annabeth F., who joined our organization and elevated our success exponentially. A chance meeting brought Paul into our orbit, and he soon became the backbone of our field operations. Later that year, Annabeth reached out to PDP to help save a colony of prairie dogs outside her workplace. She immediately became one of our most enthusiastic volunteers, getting heavily involved in relocations and outreach. In 2011, Annabeth joined PDP's board as our Humane Alliance Coordinator, a position created to formalize the work she was already doing liaising with other animal welfare and conservation organizations to amplify the impact of all.

Paul and Annabeth seemed to be the last in our community of animal lovers to notice how much they had in common. They finally did connect over their love of the outdoors, the wildlife that inhabits it, the small footprint that they are passionate about living in all aspects of their lives, and their shared intellect. In 2015, Paul and Annabeth left Albuquerque to live off-grid in the wilds of Colorado, leaving PDP bereft of not one, but two, of our most valuable contributors. It was, of course, a surprise to no one when they married on May 5 this year.

It was also ten years ago when C. Rex and I traveled to Wabash, Indiana, to meet and collaborate with Dianne J., the kind and gentle soul who runs the Midwest Prairie Dog Shelter. At the end of our rescue season, we had four prairie dogs that had been captured from Albuquerque colonies but could not be released due to injuries. Two of them had been left blind by poisoning; the other two had mobility issues. At that time PDP was only beginning to cultivate experienced guardians who could shoulder the long-term care for such compromised prairie dogs. Without a moment's hesitation, Dianne offered to provide them hospice care in her state-of-the-art shelter. C. Rex and I undertook the long drive to deliver the hapless critters to their new home, where they would receive the most loving care imaginable. Our joyful meeting with Dianne laid the foundation for a 10-year long collaborative friendship.

Since our meeting ten years ago, Dianne (and her shelter) moved to Ft. Wayne, Indiana. There she reconnected with Tom B., a fellow she had known when they were both young adults. They soon fell in love! A couple of years ago, C. Rex and I had the pleasure of meeting Tom when his work brought him briefly to Albuquerque, and we were delighted to pronounce him worthy of our dear friend Dianne. These two wonderful people, both

known for their infectious laughter, joined their extended families (which include a host of rescued animals) and tied the knot on Sept 31 this year. ❖

In Memoriam

Suzy Gerard

By Yvonne Boudreaux

It saddens me to tell you about the sudden passing of Suzy Gerard on March 7 this year. We met Suzy in August of 2016 and quickly came to enjoy her friendship and rely upon her because of her dependability and unwavering devotion to prairie dogs. She had been a staunch advocate for the species while living in Santa Fe; so when she relocated to Albuquerque, she contacted PDP to offer her help. Suzy brought years of experience with monitoring prairie dog colonies, and she quickly familiarized herself with Albuquerque's many fragmented colonies. She volunteered to be PDP's Feeding Coordinator, and we got to know each other as we strategized for the upcoming season.

Suzy was smart and elegant. She often dressed in red, her favorite color. With her small stature and vibrant yet sensitive personality, she reminded one of a beautiful bird. She was a friend to all animals, but had a special place in her heart for cats, dogs, and horses—and of course prairie dogs. Knowing how much Suzy had enjoyed her brief collaboration with us, her oldest friend, Caryn, who lives in California, reached out to PDP. Our conversations have only served to deepen our respect for Suzy, a wonderful, lovely, and generous soul taken far too soon. ❖

Stephanie Huerta

By Yvonne Boudreaux

It is impossible to convey how terribly heartbroken I am over the loss of dear Stephanie in April of this year. She was a talented artist, nationally known for her bronze castings, many of which can be seen around Santa Fe. As a performance artist, she bared her soul in beautiful fire dances that she performed for friends and shared on social media. Stephanie was generous to a fault—just a lovely person—inside and out!

Ed and I met Stephanie more than 10 years ago, when we heard about each other from mutual friends. She was a prairie dog lover as well, so much so, that she had her husband, Dennis B., build a habitat for compromised prairie dogs just outside the window of her home studio. It was essentially a 10-foot deep concrete pool filled with dirt in a 15' x 15' mesh enclosure. At the time, I had been caring for six little orphaned pups and was considering letting them live out their lives in Stephanie's habitat. These tiny helpless creatures that I had syringe-fed for weeks had kidnapped my heart, so I was understandably apprehensive to relinquish them to anyone else. When I met Stephanie and saw the marvelous habitat that her husband had built, I was relieved to know that my sweet babies would live happily in her care.

Little did we know at the time, those pups would become models for exquisite prairie dog figurines that Stephanie cast in rich hues of resin. That was one of her many gifts to us over the years. At her behest, we have stingily awarded these cherished figurines to

people who have made a tremendous effort on behalf of prairie dogs in this region. Her passing coincided with the rush of our annual rescue season, and I have since pondered over what possible annual memorial we could create to honor her legacy. Nothing I've come up with so far seems adequate in the least. Her life continues to inspire us, and she will be forever missed.



***Editor's Note:** As I was working on last year's newsletter, we lost two foster prairie dogs that were cherished by their caregivers, and there was not time or space to include their stories in that issue. I offer them here to honor the lives of these precious animals who gave so much joy.*

Squeakers

In 2012, PDP partnered with the Humane Society of the United States' Prairie Dog Coalition to rescue over 300 prairie dogs from a hoarding situation. Most were returned to natural lives at the Sevilleta NWR. Some were too weak to survive the transition, and others were deemed too compromised to release. There were four sickly prairie dogs that we referred to as the "minis" because they were the size of mid-season pups, even though we knew that they were at least a year old. (Only two of those survived long enough to find foster homes.) One of them barked constantly whenever people were around. Margaret D. adopted the little female and named her Squeakers. Soon after she brought the vocal little prairie dog home, she realized that Squeakers was blind.

Without her sight, Squeakers was content to live in a large kennel beside Margaret's bed. The few times she did get out and wander, she would bark at the top of her lungs as if to say, 'Help me, I'm lost. Please come and get me.' Margaret's cats liked to snuggle up beside the kennel, but Squeakers never seemed to mind. If she had minded, she would surely have let it be known, for as Margaret would be the first to tell you, Squeakers was a very opinionated prairie dog. She barked loudly whenever she wanted something. For a treat, she got half a fresh black cherry every day, and she would bark if she thought her morning treat had been forgotten. She didn't like to be held, but Margaret could reach into her kennel to caress her.

In the spring of 2016, Margaret noticed that Squeakers' head seemed to be swollen on the right side, so she took her to see Dr. Russman, her vet at the VCA Animal Hospital. The wonderful vets there performed the delicate surgery to remove her right eye and a tumor that was behind it. They gave Squeakers over six more months of joyful life! Unfortunately, by fall, Squeakers became exceedingly agitated. When Margaret brought her food, she would bark loudly and then retreat to the back of her kennel. When Squeakers stopped eating, Margaret took her back to the vet, where her worst fear was confirmed. The tumor had grown back, and there was nothing more they could do. Margaret had to say goodbye to the little blind prairie dog who had been her sweet, if opinionated, companion for four years.

I am sometimes asked, 'Why do you spend so much of your time and money talking about kindness to animals when there is so much cruelty to men?' I answer: 'I am working at the roots.'

—George Thorndike Angell (1823-1909) American lawyer, philanthropist, and advocate for the humane treatment of animals

Prince Pooh Bear

By Frances Gauthier

In the fall of 2010, PDP took in two black-tailed prairie dogs that had been consigned to the pet trade as pups and subsequently neglected by their "owners." The male and older female were in a dreadful state when they arrived. Their fur was thin and smelly, their body tone poor, and they had festering urine burns on their paws from having been kept in an unclean cage, where they were forced to stand in their own waste. Yvonne B. spent the next few months restoring them to health. Not having been nurtured as they should have been, neither of them was sociable. The male, in fact, was quite aggressive and tried to bite Yvonne every chance he got. Margaret D. dubbed the pair William and Kate, after the couple whose upcoming royal wedding was all the rage at the time. Jim T. adopted Katie and gave her loving care in the twilight of her life, for the old gal passed away at the end of July the following year.

Yvonne renamed the male Prince Pooh Bear, a name she felt reflected his inclusive spirit, for he had come to realize that the animals and people around him meant him no harm and could be his friends. Prince, as everybody called him, would spend his days lounging with the other rescued animals that shared his quarters: a female black-tailed prairie dog name Li-Too, a diminutive Gunnison's prairie dog named Nemo, a bunny named Blackberry Bright Eyes, and Earl the squirrel. Okay, maybe he only tolerated the rambunctious squirrel, but he was gracious enough to groom the rabbit on occasion.

Most rescued animals have one special person in their life. Prince had stolen multiple hearts, and there were three of us that he considered "his" people. Of course there was his mom, Yvonne, who was the first to soothe his wounded heart and tended daily to his every need. Prince was also a Daddy's boy. After the loss of his dear friend Petie in 2007, C. Rex (Ed) had steeled himself against getting that close to another rescued animal, but Prince broke through his defenses and formed a special bond with him. And then there's me. Though I didn't even live in the same house, Prince let me be one of "his" people too. He was my friend—as much a friend as any with two legs! Whenever I visited, I would pick him up, and he would throw his head back with a joyous woo-hoo to tell me that he was happy to see me. We brightened each other's day—that's what friends do.



Prince outlived most of his animal friends, but eventually his muzzle greyed, cataracts stole his eyesight, and he became too weak to woo-hoo for his favorite people. When his appetite failed and he became a shadow of his former self, we had to let him go. We said goodbye on October 20 last year. His three people miss him very much! ❖

Snuggles

By Jim Trever

On September 3, 2013, two female black-tailed prairie dogs were rescued by Dion V.K. from a deceased lady's trailer in Clovis, NM. In that trailer there were 140 animals of all kinds, including snakes, and none of them had been fed for two weeks. I offered to give the two prairie dogs a new home, and Dion arranged to get them to me that week. Having previously been housed in a very small rabbit cage, the two seemed delighted to explore their new accommodations, a much larger four-story cage. I was able to cuddle them after only a week. One of them, especially, always wanted to snuggle with me, so I named her Snuggles. I named the other one Hummer because she always made little noises, despite the fact that she could not bark a yahoo like other black-tails.



I can honestly say that the bond I had with Snuggles was the strongest I have ever experienced with any of the many prairie dogs I have fostered since 1998. She would sit on the third floor of her cage and stare at me until she got my attention. I would then bring her to my bed to snuggle while I worked on whatever. She would curl up beside me and frequently just go to sleep. She loved sleeping next to me. Frequently, Hummer would join us and preen Snuggles while she slept. After Hummer died in January of 2016, Snuggles naturally wanted more of my attention. She would get me to snuggle with her a good four times a day, and I was happy to oblige!

Whenever I presented lectures or tabled at outreach events for PDP, I took Snuggles and Hummer with me to act as spokesrodents. They were both wonderful ambassadors for their species. During her time with me, Snuggles made appearances at 25 outreach events in which she reached thousands of people—attracting the crowds, sparking curiosity, and eliciting delight.

Around late June of this year, Snuggles suddenly stopped eating and drinking. I tried to give her Critical Care formula by

syringe, but she would not take it. I thought she was ready to shut down. Then she started eating again on her own and seemed fine for the next month. I took her to the vet on August 3 to have a check-up and get her teeth trimmed. Sadly, Snuggles passed away in her sleep five days later. She was at least eight years old, probably closer to ten. She was tired out and it was time. I am glad that she did not suffer at the end, but I regret that she was not in my arms when she passed. I am most grateful that I was able to give Snuggles a happy life her last four years. I miss her very much! ❖

Pogo

In 2016, just as our busy rescue season was starting, one of our compadres in the rescue world asked if PDP would take over care for an adult male pocket gopher that had been raised in captivity. He had been rescued when he was a very young juvenile from a site where there were no other pocket



gophers. Yvonne B. agreed to give him a home and named him Pogo. Because he was a nocturnal animal, he generally stayed hidden from view during the day, tucked inside his wooden castle or his tunnel. Early in the morning or late at night, the shy little rodent could be seen engaged in his favorite pastime, moving piles of bedding and hay from one spot to another. The industrious little guy never seemed to be done redecorating his home, but he did it with such fervor that he was a joy to watch. Pogo passed away this past summer. We miss his boundless enthusiasm! ❖

Final Thoughts

In 2017, PDP:

- relocated 765 prairie dogs to wild habitat
- cleared three sites
- relocated a skunk, a cat, three squirrels, and three rats
- rescued a guinea pig and two rabbits
- placed six compromised prairie dogs in foster care
- conducted 11 outreach events
- sustained numerous urban colonies by providing supplemental food

We'd like to do even more with your help. Please join us for our annual meeting on:

Date: Sunday, January 28, 2018

Time 1:00-3:00 P.M.

Location:

James Joseph Dwyer Memorial Police Substation,
12700 Montgomery Blvd. NE



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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 _____

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