



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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Greetings fellow prairie dog lovers! With your support Prairie Dog Pals (PDP) continues its mission to preserve the Gunnison's prairie dog species and their habitat. Herein find the tales of our 2025 season.

Spring Yard Sale!

Come one, come all! PDP will hold its spring yard sale on April 17 and 18 from 8:00 A.M.-2:00 P.M. at 917 Morris St. NE. All proceeds will be used to benefit the prairie dogs.

We'll have house wares, some small appliances, tools, craft items, glassware, plants and much more for sale. Please spread the word to your family and friends. We hope to see you there!

If you have any items you would like to donate prior to the sale, please call 505-205-7966, 505-450-3957 or 505-237-0347 to arrange a mutually convenient drop off date and time. It would be extra helpful if you could price the items, as you have a better idea of the original cost. Your donations are tax deductible, and we will gladly provide you with a letter documenting your donation. ❖



Jim T. Retires



Jim T., PDP's long-serving outreach coordinator has retired. He had been a licensed wildlife rehabilitator for 14 years in North Carolina, where he had worked with orphaned squirrels. Jim fell in love with prairie dogs after adopting five black-tailed prairie dogs that had come from the pet trade and were in need of a good home. When he moved to Albuquerque in late 2010, he decided that he would put his experience to work making a difference in the lives of our local Gunnison's prairie dogs. He contacted PDP to volunteer within his first two weeks in New Mexico!

Through the years, Jim has supported our organization in so many ways! During his first couple of years, he assisted with field operations, helping with trapping and flushing. He participated in many releases over the years, often documenting the event with his camera to share vicarious experiences with our online followers.

As we work to relocate urban Gunnison's prairie dogs to wild habitat, sometimes we capture one that we feel should not be released due to health issues. Jim volunteered to take over care for 21 of these compromised prairie dogs, knowing full well the time and expense (vet visits) that their care would involve. Jim made whatever accommodations he could to meet their needs. Seven of them required fostering because they had to have their incisor teeth removed due to missing or misaligned teeth, so Jim cut all their food into little pieces.



Jim releasing a prairie dog to its new home.

Others required special diets to address some deficiency or severe malnutrition. An x-ray of a female pup named Eubank showed that her bones were weak and one of her legs had been broken. Jim suspected that she had been orphaned at an early age and missed out on vital calcium from her mother's milk, so he took special care to get calcium into her diet. Macy, an adult male, came in positively emaciated. Eventually, it became clear that he was starving because he had ingested a piece of plastic. Jim nursed Macy back to health.



Macy before and after.

Some of Jim's charges had physical disabilities. He cared for Ducky, a pup whose hind limbs were partially paralyzed. Tiny had difficulty walking, possibly due to a neurologic issue. Playful and Fang were blind. Due to his blindness, Fang was fearful of everything and lashed out viciously, but Jim eventually won him over.

Jim also cared for 12 black-tailed prairie dogs. Many of them had special needs too, having been rescued following some calamity that left them disabled. Flower had been attacked by a hawk when she was just a pup and needed to have her right forelimb amputated. Rosebud had been hit by a car, which left her partially blind. Others had simply been taken from the wild as pups and sold by pet stores. Each of them found their way to Jim when their previous caregivers were no longer able or willing to care for them. Snuggles and Hummer were rescued from a hoarding situation; an 85-year-old woman had died, leaving behind 142 animals of various species. Prairie came to live with Jim after three previous caregivers had relinquished her.

Fostering prairie dogs is not for the faint of heart—they are, after all, wild animals. Many Gunnison’s exhibit aggressive behavior in the fall and winter months. Even after prolonged contact with a foster prairie dog, one can experience unexpected and sometimes severe bites! Jim has said, “No one lives with prairie dogs without the scars to prove it!” For those that survived long enough, Jim was eventually able to gain their trust, and in some cases even affection, through much patience and perseverance.

Whether a prairie dog was with Jim for a few short weeks or a few years, each received his utmost care. Jim cherished each one of them and made sure their final days were filled with love and compassion. Perhaps the biggest burden of being a foster caretaker is constantly having your heart broken and having to say goodbye. Each of them left a little paw print on Jim’s heart.

Of course, Jim’s biggest contribution to our organization was the time and passion he gave to our outreach program. In early April 2011, just a few short months after his arrival, Jim took on the task of providing outreach presentations. Outreach was a natural fit for Jim because he has a gift for gab and seemingly has never met a stranger. He 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.

Ignoring the advice of W.C. Fields to never work with animals or children, Jim preferred to work with a “spokesrodent” (usually one of his foster prairie dogs), knowing that he would always be upstaged by his small furry companion. They were wonderful ambassadors for their species—sparking curiosity and eliciting delight. Their presence drew people in, giving Jim a chance to educate the public on the importance of prairie dogs and the plight they face.



Jim giving a Powerpoint presentation.

Jim’s dedication to the job was admirable. He never missed an opportunity to educate people about prairie dogs, their importance to grassland ecosystems and the threats to their survival. He logged many miles on his car, sometimes traveling for hours to get to a venue. Usually working by himself, he had to carry loads of materials for his presentations—handouts, audio/visual equipment and a prairie dog or two. He accommodated short-notice requests and even early morning show times. He was often tasked with delivering multiple presentations. Once he did a marathon stint at a high school, where he gave five back-to-back lectures. During the Covid pandemic, he even delivered presentations over Zoom.

We knew that Jim was doing a great job at outreach as evidenced by his many requests for return engagements. Some organizations had him come back year after year. Jim’s well-received presentations also boosted our finances, as he often brought in donations or sold some of our merchandise. The PDP board voted to add Jim as a member in 2017.

Jim could probably still recite his “Prairie Dogs in Peril” lecture in his sleep. During his years as Outreach Coordinator, he presented it 75 times. Fifty-five of those presentations were at schools or camps, where he reached well over 2500 children. Jim found giving presentations at schools especially rewarding, as he hoped to inspire the younger generation to value prairie dogs.

Our outreach activities also include engaging with the public at events such as community festivals. Though it takes a team to man a table for hours at one of these events, there was rarely ever a “tabling” event at which Jim did not participate. Jim tabled four to six times a year, talking with thousands of people about our fine furry friends. We attribute many of the donations we received at these events to Jim’s interactions. And he was quite the salesman—it was usually Jim who managed to sell one or more of our plush prairie dogs.

Jim has also been a generous donor through the years, whether augmenting our feed budget or funding some special need that cropped up. He designed a T-shirt to sell at outreach events and donated the funds to order the initial inventory. Jim raised funds for PDP by asking his many Facebook friends to donate in honor of his birthday.



Jim at Bosque del Apache’s Festival of the Cranes.



Tablecloth Jim had made for outreach events.

Jim is still “dad” to two black-tailed prairie dogs, Sunny and Rusty. They were Jim’s spokesrodents during 2023 and 2024, representing their species at 21 outreach presentations and 7 tabling events.

Jim has finally retired! We thank him for his 14 years of service to PDP. Sunny and Rusty have retired as well. We wish Jim and the boys all the best in retirement! ❖



Sunny and Rusty relaxing after an outreach event.

*What we have done for ourselves alone dies with us;
what we have done for others and the world
remains and is immortal.*
—Albert Pike

Yips & Nips

Yips to Becky D., C.J. M. and Sheila P. for the very generous donations you made to our cause in 2025! We will put these funds to good use for the benefit of our local prairie dogs.

Yips to Sharyn D. who donates her time/talent and the cost of printing to make the beautiful calendars that we gift to our monthly and large donors. Thanks also to Sharyn for donating tables and shelving units for use at our yard sales.

Nips to the agency responsible for “landscraping” the areas along the I-40 freeway and Tramway Blvd. Besides its effects on the prairie dogs, it is adding to erosion and rainwater runoff. ❖

Special Thanks

There is a charitable foundation (which wishes to remain anonymous) that has given us grants in the past. They called us this past year to let us know that they were awarding us a \$5000 grant toward our mission of saving prairie dogs. On the call, they asked C. Rex if we had any outstanding special needs beyond our normal operations. He responded that our tanker was in need of repairs that would run us \$3500. They offered to cover those expenses as well.

The repairs have been completed. Our tanker has new axles, wiring, brakes, brake controller, suspension shackles and a new jack. To the folks at this foundation we offer you our sincere thanks! ❖

2025 Spring Yard Sale

We held our 2025 spring yard sale on May 16 and 17 at Frances L.G.’s house. We can’t thank Frances enough for letting us totally overrun her property for several days each year in hopes of boosting PDP’s coffers. Sales on that day came to a little over \$1200. As per usual, there were some donated items that we felt would garner a higher price if advertised on online platforms; so we brought in more dough in the months that followed. Items we culled were donated to Animal Humane New Mexico’s thrift store. ❖

Stewardship

There are three important aspects of PDP’s mission: stewardship, relocation and outreach. Relocation may be the one that tends to grab people’s attention, but without stewardship many of the prairie dogs in our remaining urban colonies might not live long enough to be relocated to wild habitat. It is the mission of our stewards to provide supplemental food where these urban colonies are lacking sufficient natural foliage to sustain them.

Our stewards are a dedicated group of individuals, working hard from spring through fall to keep their colonies fed. Before they even get on site, they have to spend time prepping food, chopping carrots and other vegetables or fruit. To distribute the food across large areas, they have to carry heavy loads while navigating uneven ground. It is especially challenging in areas where the ground is steep, like along some of the I-40 on- and off-ramps. Conditions are often hot and dusty.

As stewards have retired or moved away, we have been extremely lucky to find new volunteers in the nick of time to do this hard but rewarding work. We appreciate all our stewards, new and old. Bobbie C. has been feeding the areas around the I-40 Tramway Blvd. interchange since 2006, and Mike T. started helping her in 2015. Around that same year, we came across two ladies, Veronica W. and Priscilla T., who were out feeding prairie dogs on their own. PDP founding member Bonny P. came back into our orbit five years ago when she

started feeding the Sonic colony, and is now assisted by David C. We were in a real pinch in 2019 when long-time steward Becky D. was forced to retire due to an injury; fortunately, Ray W., one of our main flushers, stepped up and took on steward duties as well. We were lucky to add Susan B. and Barry H. to our ranks in 2023 and Nancy O. in 2024.

It may seem like we have a lot of folks to keep our Albuquerque prairie dogs fed, but we are always in need of more help. The more volunteers we have, the lighter the burden on all. If you feel a calling to help with this important task, please call (505) 296-1937 or email prairiedogpals@prairiedogpals.org. ❖

Volunteers don't get paid—not because they're worthless, but because they're priceless.
—Sherry Anderson

Our Newest Prairie Dog Pal

This past year, it was our good fortune to find someone who already had lots of experience with prairie dog stewardship. Our newest steward, Cindy D., has been fascinated by prairie dogs ever since she was a little girl living in Arizona. She feels a deep spiritual connection with prairie dogs and considers the prairie dog her spirit animal. When she moved to Santa Fe in 2014, Cindy answered an advertisement in the local paper looking for people to help feed the prairie dogs there. She served as a steward in Santa Fe for the better part of ten years.

Cindy moved to Albuquerque at the end of 2023. Life was hectic for a while, but once she got settled in, she knew that she wanted to work with prairie dogs again. In August this past year, she reached out to our president, Yvonne B., through a Facebook group. The timing was fortuitous because we really needed another steward to help cover colonies along the I-40 freeway. Cindy was ready, willing and able! She has taken over stewardship of the colonies on either side of the westbound Juan Tabo Blvd. off-ramp.

And that's not all! Cindy has graciously volunteered to take on the job of Outreach Coordinator. She has a background in curriculum development, so we are sure that she will be perfect for the job. We are so pleased to welcome Cindy to our team! ❖

Van Buren Middle School

Our spring relocation season is very short. We could sure cut down on our summer work if we could reduce colony populations by relocating adults, particularly birthing-age females (at least 2 years old), prior to the mating event. We would use the term “mating season,” except that the females in a colony all come into heat at the same time for just a few hours. Years ago, we worked on the assumption that the pups were born around May 1 and then weaned and emerged topside about the middle of June; but earlier spring temperatures due to climate change have added an element of unpredictability.

We believe the prairie dogs are mating earlier now, some years much earlier. This complicates matters for us. We can't start too early because we won't flush unless the temperature is above 50 degrees. If we capture prairie dogs too late, we run the risk of having pups born in the staging facility. That is something we wish to avoid because then we have to keep the mom and pups until the pups are weaned and release them all in summer. Because of this, we limit spring capture operations to sites where population control is critical. This past spring, the site that met that criterion was at Van Buren Middle School.

A little history first: Van Buren Middle School is on the corner of Louisiana Blvd. and Southern Ave. SE and is adjacent to Phil Chacon Park, a large 20-acre complex. Years ago, prairie dogs moved into the park, likely migrating from the expansive open areas on Kirtland Air Force Base. They took up residence across a 4-acre

swath that included the soccer field and a multi-use area. Over 2006 and 2007, we relocated an astounding 535 prairie dogs from the park. In 2008, we also cleared 77 prairie dogs from the nearby school grounds.

We returned to Phil Chacon Park many times over the years attempting to clear the park. It became critical in 2023 when city officials announced plans to renovate the park. Our crew relocated 88 prairie dogs that year and felt fairly sure that they had finally cleared the park. Construction commenced in mid-January 2024, and the park reopened on May 3, 2025. To prevent the prairie dogs from returning to the park, the renovation included an underground concrete wall.

But wait! During those years, some prairie dogs had migrated from the park and reestablished a colony on the school's soccer and baseball fields; thus, Van Buren Middle School became a priority for 2025. During our short spring season, C. Rex and Ray W. only managed to flush there twice. Fortunately, five of the seven prairie dogs captured were female. Over June and July, C. Rex made seven more trips to the school, sometimes accompanied by Ray or Mike T. They removed another 17 prairie dogs from the soccer and baseball fields. We'll have to monitor the site to see if there were any holdouts. ❖

Rio Bravo

Often we learn about a colony in peril from a concerned citizen. In late 2023, Susan V., an employee at Print Express (the company that prints our newsletter) made us aware of a colony on a large rectangular lot on the west side of town. She sent us an urgent email the following May, saying that the middle section of the lot had been fenced off with construction equipment parked inside.

The rescue at Rio Bravo kicked off our 2024 summer season. Ray W. contacted the construction company, and they were willing to give us a week to remove the prairie dogs from the site. For three days, Ray and C. Rex flushed and covered burrows, both on the construction site and the portions of the lot east and west of it. They caught nine prairie dogs from the construction site and felt confident that they had gotten them all. Blading was due to begin the following week.

Ray and C. Rex continued working because they felt it important to clear the entire lot. There was very little foliage there to sustain the remaining prairie dogs. Also, because of its location, they figured that the remaining portions of the lot would likely be developed as well. The guys had caught 21 prairie dogs from the east and west sides in that first week, and they returned in late August to snag another 20. C. Rex estimated that there were 30 prairie dogs left.

According to prairie dog math, there are always more than you think there are. Ray and C. Rex. made 7 trips to the site in June 2025 and captured 48 prairie dogs. Follow-up trips in August and September yielded only three prairie dogs. C. Rex thinks there are less than 10 prairie dogs left and hopes to round them up this year. ❖



Sonic

There's a story told by long-time members of PDP about a project to clear prairie dogs from a vacant lot just east of the Sonic drive-in on Central Ave. No matter what bait was put in the traps, the prairie dogs just weren't interested. Finally, someone got the idea to buy some tater tots from Sonic, and that did the trick! Tater tots are not any healthier for prairie dogs than they are for us, but the prairie dogs had become accustomed to people tossing them a fry or tot from their cars. The trappers caught most of the colony, but there were a few holdouts. Several attempts were made over the years to round up the stragglers with little success.

About five years ago, Bonny P., one of PDP's founding members, stopped at Sonic for a drink and saw that the colony had rebounded. There were quite a few prairie dogs and a few squirrels as well. (They evidently like tater tots too.) There were some weeds on the lot, but no grass. Bonny took it upon herself to become steward for the colony and started making twice weekly trips to bring carrots.

Those of us who live in Albuquerque know that east Central Ave. is not the best part of town. There is a high crime rate in the area. In addition, the lot is often frequented by homeless people who tend to leave lots of trash behind. Bonny felt it wasn't a good situation for herself or the prairie dogs, so she begged Yvonne B. to send someone to try again to clear the colony.

Yvonne got C. Rex to add the site to his flushing schedule starting in 2023. He would work the site with help from Frances G. That year they only managed to catch two squirrels. The burrows there are old and deep, and the prairie dogs smart enough to backfill the openings in a hurry. The following year their luck was not much better. On the very last burrow, C. Rex flushed a large female prairie dog. That was disappointing because it meant that she would be relocated without another member of her colony.

In 2025, C. Rex and Frances hit the site early in the season. As they drove up, they kept track of exactly which burrows they saw prairie dogs run to. Still, after the previous years' experiences, they were not expecting much success. You can imagine their delight when they captured five prairie dogs and a squirrel that day! Heartened by that achievement, C. Rex and Frances returned two days later. Unfortunately, the prairie dogs had wised up, and the duo only caught a single squirrel.

Frances decided to follow up by trapping, which had its challenges as well. Fortunately, there was someone there who could provide some help. As Bonny had become a regular customer at Sonic, she'd made the acquaintance of long-time employee David C. He graciously agreed to feed the prairie dogs for her when she went out of town. In 2024, David took over feeding, with Bonny continuing to provide the carrots.

David was also a big help on the day Frances came to trap. Knowing how hard these prairie dogs were to catch, Frances opted to use niblet corn for teaser bait to draw them into the traps. Unfortunately, there is another species that is commonly drawn to hang out around fast food establishments—pigeons. And pigeons love corn! David was a godsend. To keep the pigeons occupied away from the prairie dog traps, David came out on his breaks and threw out some bird seed he'd had in his car.

Frances trapped three prairie dogs and had her eyes set on a fourth. Unfortunately, another problem cropped up for which David could not provide assistance. A homeless man came and sat down between some bushes just a few feet away from the burrow of the prairie dog Frances was hoping to catch. He left a few minutes later but returned two more times. He even kicked one of the traps, causing the door to trip. Perhaps he thought he was helping the prairie dogs. Nevertheless, there was no point in continuing. Frances picked up the traps and headed for the staging facility. At least we were able to reduce the Sonic colony population by eight in 2025. ❖

It is not an act of kindness to treat animals respectfully. It is an act of justice. —Tom Regan

Kindred Spirits

We in PDP are always happy to meet kindred spirits—other people who love and care for animals. Last year, we met one such compassionate soul, David C., who had started feeding the Sonic prairie dogs for Bonny P. the year before. David was also a big help to Frances G. when she trapped there. Frances was delighted to hear the following tale from David that just cemented his (and his wife’s) cred as animal advocates.

One spring day a number of years ago, David’s wife Debbie found a barely conscious baby squirrel on the parking lot near her work place. The squirrel had to be very young because it had very thin fur, through which you could see its pink skin. Of course, Debbie picked up the little fellow and brought him home. The couple went to a pet store and bought cans of milk formula. They bottle-fed their tiny charge around the clock. Soon the little squirrel, whom they started calling Squirrely, was a frisky new addition to their household. He would sit on their shoulders or even David’s head.



David and Squirrely (Chewbaca)

Perhaps, Squirrely became a little too frisky. David and Debbie had a couple of small dogs at the time. At first, the dogs chased Squirrely, but it wasn’t long before the confident little rodent took charge and was dominating the dogs. He would often chase the dogs away from their food bowls and treat himself. He even tried to drink David’s coffee.

As Squirrely grew, he got into more and more trouble. Chewing through the cords of some electronic equipment earned him a new name—Chewbaca. After that, they kept him mostly in their sunroom. David and Debbie could tell that the big, wide world was calling to him, so one day in late summer, they left the sunroom door cracked open for him. They lived in the Sandia Foothills at the time, an area they felt comfortable afforded him a suitable habitat. Still, they miss the little fellow. ❖

Los Altos

In 2016, we got a call from Albuquerque’s Parks and Recreation Department asking us to relocate prairie dogs from Los Altos Golf Course. Since then it has been a continuing problem because prairie dogs infiltrate the golf course on the north side where the fence butts up against the shoulder of the I-40 freeway and eastbound Eubank Blvd. off-ramp.

C. Rex made the golf course a priority this past year. By prime summer golf season, the furry critters had taken up residence around holes 1, 9 and 18. C. Rex made 20 trips there throughout the summer, with help from Mike T. on nine of them. Between them, they flushed a total of 88 prairie dogs! ❖

What you do makes a difference, and you have to decide what kind of difference you want to make.

—Jane Goodall

Sandia Vista

Sandia Vista Park is tucked into a neighborhood just southwest of the I-40/Juan Tabo Blvd. interchange. A large number of prairie dogs resided in the undeveloped area that wraps around the north and east sides of the park. Enticed by the lush green grass, prairie dogs were making forays over to the park, and some were even digging burrows there. Late in our 2021 rescue season, the city's Parks and Recreation Department contracted with us to remove the prairie dogs. We were only able to trap 44 prairie dogs before season's end.

We continued to work the site in the years that followed. We captured 89 prairie dogs in 2022. Parks and Rec officials decided to convert the undeveloped area on the east side into a dog park in 2023. Thankfully, we were successful in clearing the east area of the 55 prairie dogs that lived there in time. That year, we also removed 101 prairie dogs from the large rectangular lot on the north side of the park. In 2024, we caught 68.

Because the area was so densely populated, clearing the colony has proved to be a formidable challenge. Indeed, there is a Sisyphean aspect to the task, considering the birth rate in such a large colony. Graziella S. and Frances G. put in some long days trapping there this past year. They were able to reduce the population by 93. C. Rex and Mike T. also flushed the burrows in the park itself and caught one female prairie dog there. We will continue relocating prairie dogs from the Sandia Vista colony. We thank the Parks and Recs officials for their patience and continued cooperation! ❖

Work for Individual Homeowners

C. Rex carried out a singleton rescue of a female prairie dog hiding under some shelves in a lady's garage east of Tramway Blvd. The nearest known colony is a half a mile away. The woman thought that maybe the prairie dog had been dropped by a hawk prior to finding its way into the garage. Only Miss Prairie Dog knows for sure how she got there. Fortunately, she had no discernible injuries and seemed okay besides her state of fright. We held her for a couple of weeks to make sure, and then released her to a new home.

During the last half of July, C. Rex did work for seven homeowners, one in Peralta and the others in the East Mountains. In all, he relocated 38 prairie dogs and 1 squirrel.

Out-of-town relocations for individual homeowners are less productive than in-town rescue projects. They involve longer travel times and extra gas expenditures. Since there is no place to refill the tanker, C. Rex can only flush one tank at a time. Some homeowners offer us a donation; others do not. C. Rex often arrives to find a situation much different than described on the phone. There may be many more burrows than reported or the burrows don't even look active. For these reasons, the Albuquerque colonies remain our top priority. ❖

Lomas/Tramway

From Indian School Rd. to Lomas Blvd., there is a narrow stretch of land that sits between Tramway Blvd. and the frontage road to the west. It serves as the New Mexico Department of Transportation (NM DOT) right-of-way for Tramway Blvd. Prairie dogs reside on the southern third of that land. The frontage road curves to the west before intersecting with Lomas Blvd., leaving an open lot connected to the right-of-way. We had assumed that the lot also belonged to NM DOT, but we realized our mistake in 2022 when the property went up for sale.

We relocated prairie dogs from the lot many times over the years, starting back when the building across the frontage road was a Raley's supermarket. In 2010, the building was redeveloped as the Albuquerque School of Excellence. When the school built a second building on their property a few years later, the parents started using the lot where the prairie dogs lived for parking during morning drop-offs and afternoon pick-ups. That complicated our efforts to relocate the prairie dogs. As expected, the school bought the lot.

When Frances G. saw the for sale signs, she started trapping every day and managed to bring 27 prairie dogs in the last month of our 2022 season. She continued trapping over the next few years whenever there was no one parked on the lot. In 2023, she trapped 39 prairie dogs and got C. Rex and Ray W. to flush on a couple of weekends to bring in another 7.

The prairie dogs had become trap-smart. Frances was only able to trap three male prairie dogs in the spring of 2024; so she resorted to what we call pre-baiting. In an attempt to get the prairie dogs used to going in the traps again, she filled the traps with food but blocked them open so that they could not trip. After six days of pre-baiting, she caught four prairie dogs, but those that saw what happened remembered why you don't go into traps. Frances only caught two more prairie dogs during the rest of the summer. She had Ray and C. Rex come out and flush specific burrows where she believed prairie dogs remained, but they had no luck either.

The situation was even worse in 2025! Frances lost access to park at the place that offered her the best view from which to monitor the entire site. Then the school decided to have their high school students who drove leave their cars parked on the lot throughout the school day. That left only weekend days on which to trap when there were usually more people walking across the lot to get to the Circle K across Tramway. Still, Frances tried. She loaded her equipment on a wagon and set up under some trees. The prairie dogs didn't spend much time above ground, and when they did, they didn't go near the traps.

Frances and C. Rex went to flush one weekend and caught the ONLY prairie dog of the 2025 season. Frances covered the burrows after C. Rex flushed. The next day there were 15 open burrows. She fears for the remaining prairie dogs, but there is not much that can be done at this point. ❖

East Gate Church

Back in the late aughts and again in 2011, we relocated prairie dogs for the East Gate Church on Copper Ave. They have a large vacant field that sits south of their church and just north of the Skate-O-Mania that was home to quite a few prairie dogs. We had removed most of the prairie dogs, but a few remained. The church requested our help again this past year because they were planning to build a youth garden. C. Rex and Mike T. made a couple of passes across the field flushing all the burrows. They captured 18 prairie dogs. ❖

Santa Fe Transit Facility

In late July, Humane World for Animals (formerly the Humane Society of the United States) asked for our help with a project in Santa Fe. A well-established colony of prairie dogs was causing problems at the city's main hub for public transportation. Though there was ample natural vegetation in the area, a well-meaning community member had been providing supplemental feed. The colony population had grown to the point that the prairie dogs were coming into conflict with the transit facility's operations. Burrows were adjacent to the parking lot and walkways, and the prairie dogs' excavations were spreading dirt into pedestrian and vehicle areas.

As a rule, we do not work in areas north of Albuquerque, but Humane World convinced us that the situation of human conflict put the prairie dogs in imminent peril and offered us a \$2500 grant that would offset much of our expenses. C. Rex conducted a site survey and determined that there were roughly 100 burrows in and around the facility, though not all of them active. Because we do not normally work in Santa Fe, he then had to secure a water meter and permit so that we could use Santa Fe water for the flushing.

Our efforts included both trapping and flushing. C.J. M. was there for all of it. She, C. Rex and some volunteers from Santa Fe kicked off the project with a day of trapping. Unfortunately, the prairie dogs seemed content to forage on the natural vegetation rather than risk capture in a trap. There was also a considerable amount of foot

and vehicular traffic that often spooked any prairie dog considering entering a trap. After the disappointing round of trapping, C.J. helped C. Rex and Mike T. flush over the next three days. Flushing was a bit complicated as it was a challenge to maneuver the Suburban and tanker without impeding transit facility traffic. C.J. spent a couple more days trapping, and Ray W. came out for two final days of flushing.

Our crew captured and relocated a total of 27 prairie dogs. C. Rex estimates that there are likely 10-15 prairie dogs remaining, so additional work will be required at a later date to clear the colony. ❖

Freeway Work

Every year, we try to thin the colonies that reside alongside the I-40 on- and off-ramps at the Eubank, Juan Tabo and Tramway Blvd. interchanges. We can only flush prairie dogs from burrows where the ground is relatively level. Where the ground slopes upward, flushing becomes ineffective. We thin the colonies because there is not enough natural vegetation there to sustain them, a problem made worse due to repeated “landscaping.” We used to trap as well, but the presence of panhandlers has severely reduced the effectiveness of trapping.

C. Rex and Ray W. spent the last three weeks of the season flushing along the freeway. On two of their nine trips, they had help from two interns from Valle del Oro National Wildlife Refuge. By season’s end, the crew had captured 36 prairie dogs (4 at Eubank, 26 at Juan Tabo and 4 at Tramway). ❖

A Conservation Partnership

By Ray W.

When conservation groups work together, there is no telling what can be accomplished in protecting land and wildlife. Collaboration among groups will become increasingly important as the onslaught against wildlife and habitat shows no sign of abating. PDP has worked with different conservation groups in the past and is always willing to join forces with groups that will protect wildlife and habitat for future generations. In the spring of 2025, we partnered with a group dedicated to wildlife and land conservation and achieved much in establishing a new habitat for prairie dogs.

Who is this group you may ask? For now, we and our partner in prairie dog conservation have decided to hold back on disclosing too many details. What we and our anonymous partners want is a success story and not simply a relocation story. The relocation of urban prairie dogs is one phase of a far bigger goal, and that is to establish a self-sustaining colony—a colony that despite all the pressures of life in the wild, such as disease, drought, fires, floods and predators, can survive year after year and hopefully expand. What we have completed is a successful relocation, but it is too early to pat ourselves on the back. I will come back to this story in a future newsletter, hopefully with news about a prairie dog colony that is thriving.

It is no secret that the biggest challenge for PDP in relocating our beleaguered urban prairie dogs is finding suitable release locations. Ideally, we would have multiple locations across the state where the animals could find suitable food sources and be safe from development and humans who would think nothing about shooting them for sport. We have had limited success working with private landowners. In 2023, we moved several dozen prairie dogs to a large privately held ranch in southern New Mexico.

Our primary area for relocations, however, has been a national wildlife refuge just north of Socorro. Over the past several decades, thousands of prairie dogs from Albuquerque and surrounding areas have been released there. While prairie dogs are occasionally spotted on the refuge, there are no indications that a self-sustaining colony has been established. Biologists who have studied the area cite predators and the drying out of the habitat as significant impediments to the establishment of a self-sustaining colony. Indeed, climate change is

now a major consideration for PDP in our relocation efforts. Areas south of Albuquerque that once may have been suitable habitat for prairie dogs are becoming less so, and as a result, we need to look northward.

When PDP was contacted in February 2025 by a prominent New Mexico conservation group with an idea to relocate prairie dogs to protected land, we were thrilled! The process of relocating prairie dogs to a new habitat first requires a site survey. If it is an area that already has prairie dogs, there is little that needs to be done other than making sure there are enough empty or abandoned burrows to accommodate the animals we release. In areas that once had prairie dogs but do not currently, the process is similar. We look for old burrows which could be reused and make sure that suitable forage remains for released animals. A new area which does not have prairie dogs or evidence of a past colony requires somewhat more study and may require a biologist be hired to look at the area.

The area where all our 2025 spring and summer releases took place is a beautiful tract of rolling hills covered with grass and juniper. The area is over 250 acres, large enough to support several prairie dog colonies. I did a site survey with members of the conversation group, and we chose an area to begin a release. The idea was to establish a self-sustaining colony, and if successful, add other sites within the protected area. While the area had no active prairie dog colony, nor evidence of older ones, it was within miles of other colonies. The mixture of grasses looked ideal, and the ground did not appear to be too difficult to excavate—an important consideration as we would have to dig starter burrows. Three large grassy areas were identified as potential colony sites, but in the end, we decided to concentrate our efforts on one.

The next step was to auger starter burrows. I contacted several companies, large and small, to get estimates for the work to create 30 five-foot-deep burrows. The estimates ranged between \$3,500 and \$7,000. One of the lower estimates came out to \$120 per burrow! With this high cost and the potential damage to the land from heavy equipment, we decided to purchase our own handheld auger and do the work ourselves. We purchased a quiet but effective electric auger made by Ryobi and a 3-foot-long, 4-inch-diameter auger bit with an extension—enough to dig a burrow 4-4.5 feet deep.

At the end of April, I worked with our conservation partners to auger 12 burrows within a flagged-off area of roughly three acres. As we only had seven prairie dogs in the staging facility, this was sufficient for a start. The first seven animals for the colony were released on April 29.



Ray releasing a prairie dog.

Mike T. and I used the time between April and mid-June, when we do not capture animals due to the birthing season, to create more burrows. Our goal at the time was to auger as many burrows as possible for an overall goal of 150. An electric auger, while much quieter and cleaner than a gas auger, is limited by its rechargeable batteries. We had three batteries which allowed us to make 20-25 burrows a day.

The work went well as the soil was not too difficult to work with, and by mid-June, we had created 131 burrows. While short of our goal, we were ready for the beginning of summer releases. The second release of 20 prairie dogs took place on June 22. Over the next several weeks, Mike and I continued to release prairie dogs in groups of 20-25. We were limited to that number because we could each only carry two kennels with five to six prairie dogs per kennel. Getting to the release site was a hike, perhaps a half mile from where we could park. Mike continued to do releases with an assistant while I was out of the country for much of July.

While doing later releases, we found that many of our starter burrows had been significantly expanded. In addition, many new burrows appeared, some outside the original designated area. We saw a lot of evidence of foraging from the cut grass around the burrows. We also saw some prairie dogs standing at their burrows and heard the yips of some in the distance. It seemed that they were adapting well to their new home.



It became apparent that we needed more burrows to accommodate the number of prairie dogs being released, so in mid-August we began to auger more burrows. This time, however, the work was far from easy. The summer heat had dried out the ground to something close to concrete, and we had to give up after perhaps 30 new burrows. Fortunately, the prairie dogs had abandoned many of our starter burrows and dug new burrows of their own, so there seemed to be enough starter burrows to accommodate the final releases.



A prairie dog renovated burrow.

We are grateful to the conservation group for providing the habitat for our 2025 releases. We released 379 prairie dogs (201 females and 178 males) there. Hopefully, we'll see this year that the prairie dogs have adapted well to their new habitat. Because the conservation group has begun a year-long plant and wildlife study, we will not be able to use their site for releases in 2026, but we hope to work with them again in the future. In the meantime, we will continue our search for suitable release habitat around the state. ❖

Homeowners to the Rescue

PDP is thankful for the animal heroes who rise to the occasion when they come across a fellow creature in need. One morning in mid-September, Joni L. let her two Pomeranians out around 8:00 to do their business. When she heard the dogs' incessant barking, she went out to investigate. They were looking intently at something next to the cinder block wall that bordered the yard. As Joni got closer, she saw there was a hole in the ground right next to the wall. As she peered into the hole, she saw a small animal buried chest deep in the rocky ground. She thought it was a baby but not sure what kind, maybe a hedgehog.

Joni quickly got her Pomeranians into the house and called her next door neighbor, D.J. V., for help. Joni explained the situation, and D.J. came over immediately to assess the situation. Just like Joni, she was taken aback by what she saw. How could the little animal have gotten so tightly wedged in that hole? How long had it been there? It looked exhausted.



You can see from this photo D.J. took, the poor thing looked as if it had given up!

The ladies put their heads together and came up with a plan to try and dig the little mammal out. D.J. used a soup spoon to dig around its body while Joni held a piece of cardboard between D.J.'s hand and the animal's head. The hole was narrow, so it was difficult to make progress.

Unfortunately, they were running out of time. D.J. had to be at work at 9:00, and Joni had to leave for an appointment. They hated to leave the little animal in such distress. D.J. used the spoon to dribble some water into the little critter's mouth. It closed its eyes and drank, obviously relieved to have its thirst quenched. Before the ladies left, they placed a box over the hole to shade the little one from the sun.

When D.J. got to work, she set about trying to find someone who could help free the little animal. Some people suggested she just kill it, but D.J. was determined to find a way to rescue it. Finally, a call to Wildlife Rescue of

New Mexico offered hope. They suggested she call PDP. Yvonne B. took the call and told D.J. that she and C. Rex could come out immediately. D.J. left work and met them at Joni's house around 10:00.

C. Rex immediately knew that the animal stuck in the hole was a squirrel, but he couldn't imagine how it came to be in that predicament. There is a park on the other side of that wall, and the ground on the park side is five feet lower. There was no sign of digging on the park side.

Given the progress that D.J. and Joni had made, the hole was a foot deep and the upper half of the squirrel's body was exposed. C. Rex held the squirrel's head down with one gloved hand and proceeded to dig with the other, using that same spoon. It took a little while, but C. Rex was able to remove enough dirt and rocks to carefully extract the squirrel. The squirrel barely resisted. Yvonne was standing by with a kennel full of hay.

Back at the staging facility, C. Rex and Yvonne assessed the rescuee. The squirrel was female. She didn't seem to be able to walk. It was possible that she was still dehydrated and simply exhausted from her ordeal, but they also feared that she might have a back injury. Only time would tell. They called D.J. to give her an update. D.J. and Joni decided to name the squirrel Percilla and hoped that she would fully recover.



Percilla in the staging facility.

After receiving food, water and rest in the staging facility for three days, Percilla seemed to be moving around her cage okay, so C. Rex and Yvonne decided that she could be released. They found a suitable location in the foothills area to set her free. We in PDP are so thankful for people like D.J. and Joni who go out of their way to come to the aid of an animal in distress.



Percilla leaps to freedom. ❖

A Prairie Dog Couple

By Frances G.

This past year, I lost two members of my family just a few days apart. Prairie dogs Benny and Bonnie had been with me for years, and I loved them dearly.

Benny came to live with me in 2017. In May of that year, two ladies leaving the Terrace Grove Cemetery in Belen saw what they first thought was a leaf tumbling down the road. Looking closer, they realized it was, in fact, a tiny prairie dog pup crawling across the pavement. There was no sign of its mother or siblings or, for that matter, any prairie dogs nearby. One of them scooped up the bewildered pup with a towel. The pup was syringe-fed around the clock, first by the ladies who found him and then by Wildlife Rescue staff, before being turned over to PDP.

Yvonne B. took over the task of syringe-feeding the tiny, frightened pup. His weight on in-take was only 95 grams. Even with dedicated feeding, he failed to gain hardly any weight and wasn't passing anything at all. Yvonne feared that in the time he'd spent 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. The vet prescribed a course of probiotics, and the little guy finally began to gain some weight.

In both human and veterinary medicine, the term "failure to thrive" refers to insufficient weight gain or inappropriate weight loss. Often we are able to get these compromised pups to a proper weight by augmenting their diet so that they can be released with the other prairie dogs. If they survive, they eventually reach a normal weight, but sometimes not until long after the last release of the season. A knowledgeable biologist has told us that half of prairie dog pups in the wild do not survive through the first year. We won't release a pup to the wild if it doesn't weigh at least 350 grams. With so little body mass, it's likely it would not survive through the winter.



Yvonne was hoping to integrate the little pup from Belen into a family group so that he could be released, but that was not to be. After he'd gained a bit of weight, she put him in the staging facility 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. He seemed terrified of the other prairie dogs. Each time Yvonne checked over the next 24 hours, the little guy was still awake and barking non-stop. When she opened his cage in the morning, the pup shot out, scrambled up her chest and curled up tightly under her chin. He had been so very young when he was separated from his mother. In the time it had taken to restore his health, he had become accustomed to human care.

My coterie grew that year. I was already foster mom to a female prairie dog that had been the runt of her litter and remained somewhat small for the rest of her life. She was itty bitsy Betsy. I was out of state due to a death in my family when Yvonne asked me if I would take in the little boy from Belen and another male pup that was still too small to release by that season's end. I said yes. The little pup from Belen I named Benny and the other one Caleb. The following year, Yvonne asked me if I would take in a female pup as well. I named her Bonnie. Unlike Benny, I do not know where Caleb and Bonnie came from. Caleb passed away at the beginning of 2021 and Betsy near the end of 2023.

Over seven years together, Benny and Bonnie developed a strong bond. They shared a burrow—a plastic bin filled with scraps of baby blankets. They enjoyed lounging on the shelf in their cage, basking in the sunlight that came in through the window. Benny loved running in his wheel. Bonnie evidently wondered why.

Unfortunately, in her later years, Bonnie would become aggressive during the winter months. I'd separate them for a few months, but they were right back to besties come spring.



Benny and Bonnie lounging in the sun together.

By 2024, they were both showing their age. Their muzzles were graying. Benny was fairly blind from cataracts. I had to take the shelf out of the cage to keep him from falling. He still never stopped running in his wheel. When Bonnie started her aggressive behavior coming into winter that year, I decided to leave them together to see if they could work things out. Bonnie went in and out of torpor all winter and into spring. I suppose that might have been a sign. When she was in torpor, I often pushed the blankets up between them so that Benny wouldn't feel her cold body.

One day in mid-March 2025, when I didn't see Bonnie come out of the burrow for a day or so, I figured she might have gone back into torpor. When I reached into the burrow to feel her body temperature, I realized she was gone. Her body was not just cold, but also stiff. I didn't want Benny to feel that, so I removed her body. What followed made me even sadder. Benny had never been in the habit of barking since he was a pup. The next time he walked back into the burrow and found that Bonnie wasn't there, he started barking. He barked several times over the next two days.

After that, I think Benny had a stroke. He was dragging one of his hind legs around. Amazingly, he still got in his wheel and tried to take a walk. Five days after Bonnie's passing, Benny was gone too. I think that he couldn't bear to live without her. Bonnie was seven years old when she passed, and Benny was eight. I am glad that they had so many years together, but I miss them dearly. ❖

Annual Meeting

We held our annual meeting on January 31, 2026. The minutes of the meeting can be found at: <https://prairiedogpals.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/2026-GM-Minutes-1.docx> ❖

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