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Prairie Dog Talking Points

- Prairie dogs are a keystone species with up to 205 associated vertebrates (9 considered dependant) living with them, using their burrows, or predated upon them.
- There are 5 species of prairie dogs. The ones in Albuquerque are Gunnison's, the others include Mexican, Utah, white and black tailed.
- Gunnison's prairie dogs hibernate during the winter months.
- Over the last 100 years prairie dogs have been reduced to 1% of their former range and 2% of their population.
- Some of the species are listed under the Endangered Species Act. Others are being considered for listing.
- New Mexico has the smallest remaining acreage of prairie dogs.
- Prairie dogs are territorial and will remain in or near their ancestral habitat if at all possible. The prairie dogs you see here in Albuquerque are the remnants of vast prairie dog towns that existed for hundreds of years.
- Prairie dogs live an average of 3-5 years in the wild.
- Prairie dogs are annual breeders. 50% of females over 2 years of age will breed and produce an average of 4 pups.
- Pups are usually born in early May and will emerge from their burrows after about thirty days.
- Prairie dogs have the most complex language of any animal ever studied. They have over 200 words and can form sentences identifying intruders by color, size and type of risk.
- Burrows are complex with a different area for each function of life. There are living chambers, sleeping and nesting rooms, a food storage area, toilet rooms, and flood chambers. The burrows themselves generally include a second entrance or escape way, air chambers, and listening posts in addition to the main entrance.
- As with humans, prairie dogs are the victims of plague. Virus carrying fleas are brought into the colony by wild animals or off leash cats or dogs. As they have no immunity to the plague they will die within days.
- Poisoning prairie dogs is both cruel and ineffective. The poison causes a slow agonizing death that may take up to three days.
- A mature colony tends to expand at approximately 2% annually. A poisoned colony can expand at an annual rate of 70%. Additionally the poison can pose a danger to humans, cats, dogs, and other animals in the area.