

Life in a PRAIRIE DOG TOWN



Prairie dogs are an important prey item for many predators, including coyotes, badgers, bobcats, snakes, ferrets, and several species of raptors.

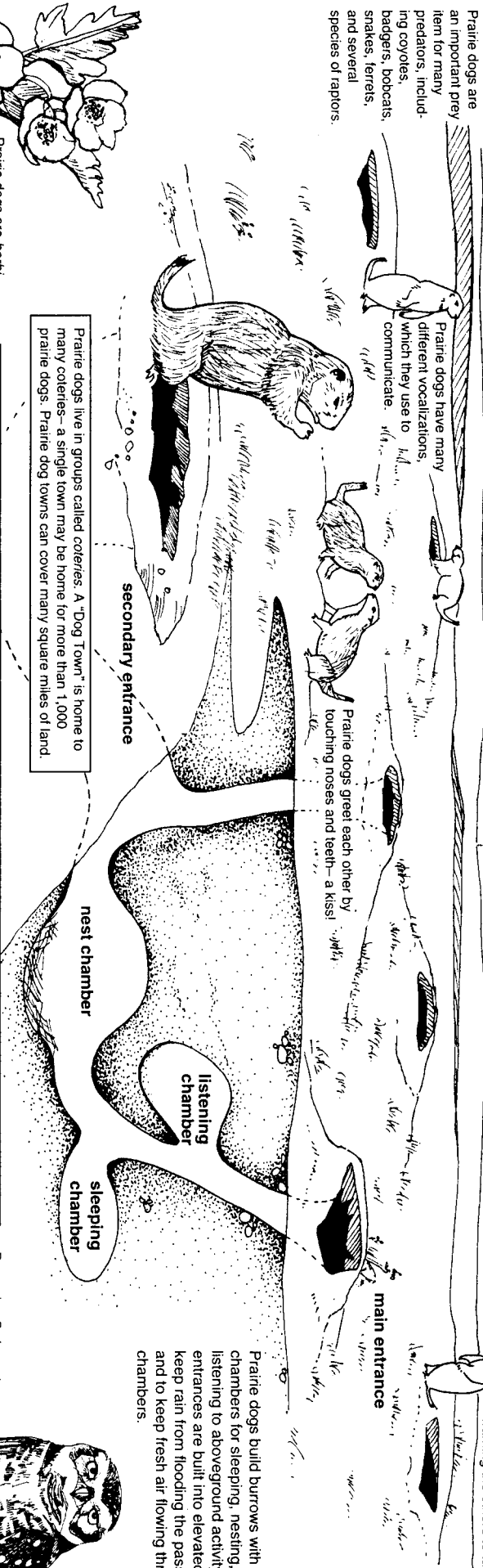
Prairie dogs are an important part of a grassland habitat because their burrowing system and vegetation clipping diversifies the grassland, providing habitat for a variety of species. Less than 100 years ago, more than 5 BILLION of these animals lived in western North America. In the early 1970s several species of prairie dogs were endangered! While there are more today than in the 1970s, populations still may be in trouble.



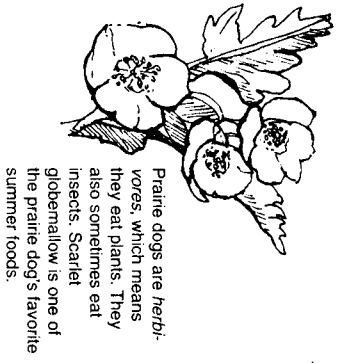
Prairie dogs help each other by keeping a watch for predators like raptors, coyotes, and badgers.

When one prairie dog sees a predator, it gives an alarm call, warning the others to take cover.

Prairie dogs build burrows with different chambers for sleeping, nesting, and listening to aboveground activity. Burrow entrances are built into elevated mounds to keep rain from flooding the passageways and to keep fresh air flowing through the chambers.



Prairie dogs live in groups called colonies. A "Dog Town" is home to many colonies—a single town may be home for more than 1,000 prairie dogs. Prairie dog towns can cover many square miles of land.



Prairie dogs are herbivores, which means they eat plants. They also sometimes eat insects. Scarlet globeamallow is one of the prairie dog's favorite summer foods.

Baby prairie dogs are called pups. Prairie dogs usually have one litter each year, with an average of 3-4 pups.

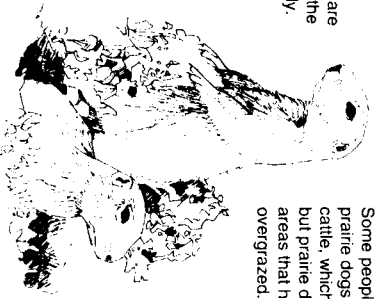


There are 5 different species of prairie dog in the United States. Adult prairie dogs are about 14 inches (36cm) long and weigh about 1.5 pounds (700 gr).



Prairie dogs are members of the squirrel family.

Male black-tailed prairie dogs live less than 5 years, and females live up to 8 years.



Some people believe that prairie dogs compete with cattle, which also eat grasses, but prairie dogs often settle in areas that have already been overgrazed.

Black-footed ferrets were on the brink of extinction, but thanks to the efforts of many people they are coming back. These grassland predators depend on prairie dogs! They not only live in abandoned prairie dog towns, but prairie dogs make up almost all of their diet.



Burrowing Owls nest underground in abandoned prairie dog burrows. Most Burrowing Owls depend on prairie dogs to excavate burrows for them to use.

