



# The Mini Page®

**Next Week:**  
Bison

Issue 29, 2020

Founded by Betty Debnam

## Meet the Prairie Dog



photo by Chris Bertram

### Mini Fact:

Prairie dogs are hunted by foxes, eagles, red-tailed hawks, badgers and coyotes.

If you're on a driving vacation this summer, keep an eye out for little animals popping up and down in the prairies beyond the highway.

Prairie dogs are great fun to watch. They busily dart from place to place, playing, working to build mounds, grooming one another, sending signals, and even seeming to kiss and snuggle.

### What's a prairie dog?

A prairie dog is not a dog at all, but a rodent. A rodent is a mammal with teeth that keep growing as long as it lives. Other members of the rodent family include squirrels, chipmunks and mice.

The most common prairie dog, the black-tailed, is found on the North American prairies. Another type, the white-tailed, lives higher up in mountainous areas. They grow to be between 12 and 16 inches long.

Prairie dogs eat mostly grasses. They sometimes add sagebrush and other prairie plants and insects to their diet.

### Prairie dog sounds

Early settlers called them dogs because their calls sound like high-pitched dog barks. Experts say different barks and body movements send different signals. For example, one bark might warn of a hawk, while a different one might warn of a snake.

Another bark might signal a person approaching with a weapon, while yet another bark might signal that the person is unarmed.



photo by NIC McPhee

### Prairie dog towns

Prairie dogs live in big underground colonies, or towns. Each family group has its own area, with separate rooms for the bathroom, food storage, sleeping and nurseries.

Texas once had the largest prairie dog town on record. It covered about 25,000 square miles and was home to about 400 million prairie dogs!

### Prairie dog mounds

The mounds they build outside their tunnel entrances serve as lookout towers, where sentries can stand to watch for danger.

In order to have a clear view if an enemy approaches, prairie dogs bite off the grass around their mounds.

The mounds also keep water from flooding the tunnels below.

If a sentry spots danger, it gives a danger call and then scampers below and listens. If it hears nothing, it peeks its head out for a double-check.



photo by Michelle Bender

### Keystone species

The prairie dog is considered a keystone species upon which other animals depend. This means that if it were to die out, other animals might become threatened or disappear.

Experts believe there are about 140 species of wildlife that eat prairie dogs or use their towns.

However, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service doesn't consider the black-tailed prairie dog to be endangered. In fact, in the United States, there are about 24 million of the little rodents.

### Prairie dog defenses

Prairie dogs do have sharp claws and teeth, but they are not good fighters. Their only real defense is to run away. They can run up to 35 mph for short distances.

To make their underground towns safer, they dig escape tunnels that they cover up so nothing can come in. However, the prairie dog can open them quickly to get out.

They don't build mounds near these escape hatches, so enemies don't know they're there.



photo by Joe Ravi

## Resources



### On the Web:

- [bit.ly/MPprairiedog](http://bit.ly/MPprairiedog)
- [wwf.to/2YsAbNs](http://wwf.to/2YsAbNs)

### At the library:

- "Prairie Dog Song: The Key to Saving North America's Grasslands" by Susan L. Roth
- "The Prairie Dog's Town: A Perfect Hideaway" by Miriam Aronin

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## Try 'n' Find

Words that remind us of prairie dogs are hidden in this puzzle. Some words are hidden backward or diagonally, and some letters are used twice. See if you can find:



- BARK, CLAWS, COLONY,
- DEFENSE, DOG, GRASS,
- KEYSTONE, MAMMAL,
- MOUND, PRAIRIE,
- RODENT, SETTLERS,
- SIGNAL, SPECIES,
- TEETH, TOWN, TUNNEL,
- UNDERGROUND,
- WARN.

J T K S F L K W A R N Q M F S  
 A C O S G S E I X J S A W P W  
 B O B W H I Y N K R M S E H A  
 A L H D N G S A N M O C A X L  
 R O T G T N T P A U I D N R C  
 K N E O Z A O L L E T F E R G  
 H Y E D R L N I S Z A C P N L  
 Z A T U N D E R G R O U N D T  
 M O U N D R O P P R A I R I E  
 F D E F E N S E T T L E R S J

## Cook's Corner

### Seaside Stroganoff

#### You'll need:

- 1/4 cup butter
- 1/3 cup mushrooms, sliced
- 1/2 onion, chopped
- 1 (10.5-ounce) can cream of mushroom soup

- 2 (6.5-ounce) cans tuna fish, drained
- 1 cup sour cream
- 2 cups egg noodles, cooked



\* You'll need an adult's help with this recipe.

#### What to do:

1. Cook mushroom and onion pieces in butter in a skillet over medium heat for 10 minutes or until onion pieces are soft. Stir often.
2. Add soup, tuna and sour cream, mixing well after each ingredient.
3. Lower heat and cook 5 minutes or until warm.
4. Serve over cooked noodles. Serves 4.

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## Mini Jokes



**Paul:** What goes 80 mph underground?

**Pat:** A prairie dog riding a motorcycle!

## Eco Note



French researchers say Belgian Malinois shepherd dogs can sniff out humans exposed to the COVID-19 coronavirus from the distinct odor in armpits resulting from the infection. For the test, researchers used dogs trained in search and rescue, to find explosives, or to sniff out colon cancer in humans. Scientists from the National Veterinary School of Alfort say that four of the dogs had a 100% success rate in detecting the virus among 360 human subjects.

adapted with permission from Earthweek.com

### For later:

Look in your newspaper for stories about wildlife that live in your area.

**Teachers:** Follow and interact with The Mini Page on Facebook!



1. Hole in the ground used by an animal, often to hide (6-letter noun)

□ □ □ □ □ □

2. An animal that annoys and can cause trouble (4-letter noun)

□ □ □ □

3. To make short, loud noises from an animal's mouth (4-letter verb)

□ □ □ □

4. An animal with a bushy tail that can climb trees (8-letter noun)

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

1. A prairie dog hid in its \_\_\_\_\_ to be safe from the fox.
2. An animal that digs holes in a farmer's field is a big \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Prairie dogs will \_\_\_\_\_ to warn others of possible danger.
4. Sue saw a prairie dog and said, "It looks like a \_\_\_\_\_."

## ROOTONYM®

by Jan & Carey Orr Cook



Study the definition. When you know the missing word, fill in the letter boxes and the sentence blanks.

Answers: Burrow, Pest, Bark, Squirrel.

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