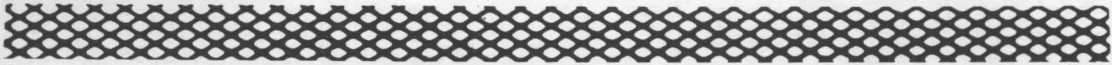


# WILDLIFE DAMAGE CONTROL



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## CONTROLLING PRAIRIE DOG DAMAGE

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The black-tailed prairie dog (*Cynomys ludovicianus*) is a large ground squirrel found on the Great Plains of the United States. Adults are approximately 10 inches long, weigh 2 to 3 pounds, are a brownish-yellow color and have a black-tipped tail. They are very vocal animals, and their constant "barking" at intruders has resulted in the name "prairie dog."

Large prairie dog colonies are called "towns." These animals are very sociable, and towns may cover large tracts of land. About 1900, a town located on the Texas High Plains occupied an area 100 miles wide by 250 miles long and contained 400 million prairie dogs.

These diurnal animals live in burrows that descend 3 to 14 feet into a lateral tunnel that may reach a length of 100 feet. A burrow may have more than one entrance, but this is not common. Mounds 6 to 8 inches in height usually surround the burrow openings.

Prairie dogs feed on various forms of vegetation. They commonly keep all vegetation nibbled to the ground near their burrow. This allows them to keep a constant watch for predators. Hawks, badgers, foxes and coyotes are the most common predators of prairie dogs.

Breeding takes place during February and March with a litter of four or five young being born a month later. Young prairie dogs are full grown at 6 months. Their average life span is 6 to 8 years. Sexual maturity is reached in 1 year for females and 2 years for males.

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### DAMAGE

Prairie dogs cause much agricultural damage. Range conditions can be altered drastically by prairie dog activities. Thirty-two prairie dogs can consume as much food per day as one cow. Grazing capacity of livestock is reduced, and the numerous burrows are a hazard to livestock. Prairie dogs also cause damage to wheat, cotton and other crops. Although constant cultivation keeps the prairie dogs from living in the fields, it is common for towns to border these areas. Thus, prairie dogs will be active in the fields and cause damage by cutting down the crops. They often do not consume vegetation which they cut.

Prairie dogs also may be considered a health hazard. They serve as a source for plague, the disease spread by fleas which live on prairie dogs.

### CONTROL METHODS

Three control measures are available, including 2 percent zinc phosphide oats, aluminum phosphide tablets and strychnine-treated oats. The 2 percent zinc phosphide oats and aluminum phosphide tablets are the recommended rodenticides. Zinc phosphide oats is most effective after the first frost in the fall because it increases the acceptance of grain bait by prairie dogs. Use of zinc phosphide requires prebaiting with regular oats, at least once, and preferably twice. To prebait, place a teaspoon of oats on the bare ground near each burrow at 2-day intervals. Bait only after the prebait has been consumed. Do not put bait out



*Prairie dog damage is evident in this wheat field.*

if there is a chance of precipitation or if the weather is extremely cold. If baiting is done in this manner, a kill of more than 90 percent can be achieved. At the present time, zinc phosphide can be applied from July 1 to January 31 only.

Aluminum phosphide tablets are small marble-sized tablets which release a phosphine gas when exposed to moisture in the air. Place two tablets in each burrow. Then cover the entrance to the burrow with soil. The soil seal is

important to keep the gas within the burrow system. Kills of more than 90 percent can be achieved with aluminum phosphide tablets.

A private applicator's license is necessary to purchase 2 percent zinc phosphide oats and aluminum phosphide tablets. The license can be obtained from the Texas Department of Agriculture.

For further information contact the local office of the Texas Rodent and Predatory Animal Control Service.

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The Texas Rodent and Predatory Animal Control Service is a cooperative program involving the Texas Agricultural Extension Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Texas Animal Damage Control Association.

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