Black-tailed Prairie Dog, *Cynomys ludovicianus*

**Alert Species**
Please report any sightings as soon as possible.

**Overview**

Short description of *Cynomys ludovicianus*, Black-tailed Prairie Dog

Prairie-dogs are short-tailed American rodents, related to squirrels, that inhabit burrows in the soil and are often seen standing upright on their hind legs, giving loud, barking alarm calls. Their fur is plain, sandy-brown, a little paler on the underside. The black-tailed prairie-dog is generally distinguished from its four congeners by a variable black tip to the tail, although this may often be absent.

**Description of *Cynomys ludovicianus*, Black-tailed Prairie Dog status in GB**

The black-tailed prairie-dog has sometimes been found breeding outside captivity in GB but has never established a long-term non-native population.

**Habitat summary: *Cynomys ludovicianus*, Black-tailed Prairie Dog**

Black-tailed prairie-dogs create large colonies ('towns'), sometimes of many thousands of individuals, usually in flat landscapes. In the USA, short- and mixed-grass prairie, sagebrush steppe, and desert grasslands are all occupied.

**Overview table**

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<th>Environment:</th>
<th>Terrestrial</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Species status:</td>
<td>Non-Native</td>
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<td>Functional type:</td>
<td>Herbivore</td>
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<td>Status in England:</td>
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<td>Status in Wales:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Location of first record:</td>
<td>Cornwall</td>
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<td>Date of first record:</td>
<td>1976</td>
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**Invasion history: *Cynomys ludovicianus*, Black-tailed Prairie Dog**

**Origin**

The native range of this prairie-dog extends across the plains of North America from southern Saskatchewan to northern Mexico (Chihuahua).

**First Record**

In 1976, a small population became temporarily established in the wild in Cornwall.
Pathway and Method

Prairie-dogs are popular subjects for zoological collections. This burrowing animal is difficult to keep in captivity because its burrow systems sometimes extend under boundary fences.

Species Status

The species is recorded only as a temporary escape or ephemeral breeder outside the confines of zoo collections. No non-native populations are known to be established in other countries.

Ecology & Habitat: *Cynomys ludovicianus*, Black-tailed Prairie Dog

Dispersal Mechanisms

Prairie-dogs are colonial animals and extensions of colonies to the outside of zoo fences do not necessarily result in dispersal of more than a few metres. In Cornwall, however, animals were found to be established at a distance of 6 km from a wildlife park. In the native range, animals moved an average of about 1.5 miles between colonies and most animals that moved were in their first year. Dispersal is facilitated by roads and tracks.

Reproduction

Black-tailed prairie-dogs normally begin breeding when two years old. The breeding season in the native range is from late February to April. Males are polygynous, often with a harem of 3–4 females. Females come into oestrus for just one day per year and give birth to a single litter of around 3–5 young, in an underground nesting burrow, after around 34 days’ gestation.

Known Predators/Herbivores

Black-tailed prairie-dogs are an important food source for many ground-based and aerial predators of the American prairies, such as foxes and buzzards, and are likely to be taken on occasion by similar predators in GB.

Resistant Stages

None known.

Habitat Occupied in GB

Escaped individuals in GB have generally been found on farmland.

Distribution: *Cynomys ludovicianus*, Black-tailed Prairie Dog

By 2009, there had been records of this species from the vicinity of wildlife parks in Cornwall, Cambridgeshire, the Isle of Wight, Norfolk and Staffordshire.

Impacts: *Cynomys ludovicianus*, Black-tailed Prairie Dog

Environmental Impact

No ecosystem impacts of escaped prairie-dogs have been reported from GB.

Health and Social Impact

In 2003, a small outbreak of human monkeypox occurred among owners of pet prairie dogs in USA.

Economic Impact

In the native range, prairie-dogs are considered incompatible with commercial arable farming and are often regarded as competitors with farmed livestock. No such problems have emerged in GB.

References & Links: *Cynomys ludovicianus*, Black-tailed Prairie Dog

Identification


**Management and impact**


**General**