

# SCIENCE QUEST GAZETTE

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## Rabbit Plays Tug-of-War Creek/Muscogee Tribe

Now Rabbit had a favorite place on the river where he always went to drink water. It was on a bend in the river, and two Snakes lived there, one on the upper side of the bend and one on the lower. Rabbit soon learned that neither of the Snakes knew that the other Snake lived there.

Ho, ho, ho, thought Rabbit. I am going to have a bit of fun!

Rabbit went to the Snake that lived on the upper bend of the river. "I am a very strong Rabbit," he told the Snake. "I bet I can pull you right out of the water."

"I bet you can't!" said the Snake, who was very strong indeed.

"I will go get a grape vine," said Rabbit. "You will pull one end and I will pull the other. "If I pull you out of the water, I win the contest. If you pull me into the water, then I win."

The Snake on the upper bend agreed. Then Rabbit went to the Snake on the lower bend and made the same deal. He told both Snakes that he would be standing out of sight on top of the river bank and would give a whoop when he was in place and ready to start the contest. Both Snakes were pleased with the arrangement. They were sure they would win against such a feeble little Rabbit.

Rabbit took a long grape vine and strung it across the wide bend in the river. He handed one end to the first Snake and the other end to the second Snake. Then he gave a loud whoop from the middle of the river bank and the two Snakes started tugging and pulling with all their might.

"That Rabbit is really strong," thought the Snake on the upper bank. He would tug and tug and the vine would come a little closer to him and then he would nearly be pulled out of the water.

"My, Rabbit is much stronger than he appears," thought the Snake on the lower bank after he was almost hurled out of the water by an extra strong pull from up the river.

Rabbit sat on the bank above both Snakes and laughed and laughed. The Snakes heard him laughing and realized that they had been fooled. Letting go of the rope, they swam to the middle of the bend and met each other for the first time.

Both Snakes were angry with Rabbit for making them look foolish. They agreed that Rabbit could no longer drink from his favorite place on the river bend where they lived. In spite of his protests, they sent Rabbit away and would not let him come down to the riverbank anymore. So whenever Rabbit grew thirsty, he had to turn himself into a faun in order to get a drink from the river.

After that, Rabbit decided not to play any more jokes on Snakes.



This month we at Science Quest adopted a baby girl Prairie Dog. We named her Penelope and she is as cute as can be.

These charismatic, rabbit-size rodents live on North America's prairies and open grasslands in only a fraction of their former numbers.

Prairie dogs live in underground burrows, extensive warrens of tunnels and chambers marked by many mounds of packed earth at their surface entrances. Burrows have defined nurseries, sleeping quarters, and even toilets. They also feature listening posts near exits, so animals can safely keep tabs on the movements of predators outside. Prairie dogs spend a lot of time building and rebuilding these dwellings. Other animals benefit from their labors. Burrows may be shared by snakes, burrowing owls, and even rare black-footed ferrets, which hunt prairie dogs in their own dwellings.

Family groups (a male, a few females, and their young) inhabit burrows and cooperate to share food, chase off other prairie dogs, and groom one another. These group members even greet one another with a prairie dog kiss or nuzzle. Young pups are very playful and can often be seen romping near their burrows.

Black-tailed prairie dogs, the best known of the five prairie dog species, live in larger communities called towns, which may contain many hundreds of animals. Typically they cover less than half a square mile (1.3 square kilometers), but some have been enormous. The largest recorded prairie dog town covered some 25,000 square miles (65,000 square kilometers). That Texas town was home to perhaps four hundred million prairie dogs.

Another prairie dog species, the white-tailed prairie dog, lives in the western mountains. These rodents do not gather in large towns but maintain more scattered burrows. All species hunker down in winter and burn the reserves of fat they have stored during more plentiful seasons. White-tails may hibernate for up to six months on their mountain plains, while their black-tailed cousins sometimes emerge to feed on especially warm days.

These large squirrels emerge from their burrows in daylight to forage and feed on grasses, roots, and seeds. They communicate with loud cries. A warning cry, for example, will send a town's denizens hustling to their holes at the approach of a badger, coyote, or other predator. A second, "all-clear" call alerts the community when the danger has passed.

Much of the Great Plains has been converted to farming or pastureland, and prairie dogs are not often welcome in such places. Because of their destructive landscaping, they are often killed as pests. During the 20th century, about 98 percent of all prairie dogs were exterminated, and their

## Fast Facts

### Type:

Mammal

### Diet:

Herbivore

### Average life span in the wild:

3 to 4 years

### Size:

Head and body, 12 to 15 in (30 to 38 cm); tail, 3 to 4 in (8 to 10 cm)

### Weight:

2 to 4 lbs (1 to 2 kg)

### Group name:

Prairie dog town

### Prairie Dog Range



# Prairie Dog Word Game

BURROWS  
 CHIPMUNKS  
 COLORADO  
 COTERIE  
 COYOTES  
 ECOSYSTEM  
 FLOWERS  
 GRASSES  
 GROOMING  
 HAWKS  
 LEAVES  
 MARMOTS  
 MEXICO  
 PREY  
 RANCHES  
 RATTLESNAKES  
 RODENT  
 ROOTS  
 SENTRY  
 SQUIRRELS  
 TEXAS  
 TOWNS  
 TUNNELS  
 WILDLIFE

Try to find **all 24** words on this box

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



## Books

The Prairie Dog: Sentinel of the Plains by Russell A. Graves

A Prairie Dog's Life by Julie Mettenburg

Prairie Dog Empire: A Saga of the Shortgrass by Paul A. Johnsgard

## Web Sites

[http://www.nationalgeographic.com/coloringbook/prairie\\_dogs.html](http://www.nationalgeographic.com/coloringbook/prairie_dogs.html)

<http://www.prairiedogcoalition.org/res-books.php>

