**Prairie Dog**

**Native to:** grasslands of North America

**Predators:** ferret, fox, eagle, hawk, badger, coyotes

**Prey:**  grasses, roots, seeds, herbs, buds, cacti, small insects

**Facts:**

* Despite their name, they are not canines, but rather a species of ground squirrel
* Fully grown, they are 1-3 lbs, and 12-14 inches long (Sandy is fully grown)
* Prairie dogs regulate their body temperatures by going into their burrows. They can live in harsh environments with extreme temperatures, bur their underground burrows keep their temperatures safe.
* Burrows are 25-50 feet long, and about 6 to 8 feet underground
* They have specific chambers for the young, multiple entrances for airflow/breeze, and even runoff chambers to prevent flooding
* Live in large communities, or families. Families consist of one male, and two-three adult females, and their young
* Family members “kiss” other family members (but not other prairie dogs outside of their family)
* 15-30 families create “towns.” In these towns, multiple tunnels connect the families’ burrows
* Families and towns are very territorial and will fight to protect their space by chattering, charging, and biting when necessary
* They signal other prairie dogs that a predator is coming by chirping loudly. The faster they chirp, the faster the predator is coming.
* They have a somewhat desirable effect on soil (aeration and fertilization) if the land is being used for grazing animals, but the majority of farmers see them as pests because they clear the immediate land of brush and vegetation near their burrows

**Defense Mechanisms:**

* Community, their loud bark, and their sharp incisor teeth

**Reproduction:**

* 3-4 pups per litter, one litter per year

**Lifespan:** 4 to 5 years in the wild 8 to 10 years in captivity

**Handling Tips:** Sandy is a 6 year old female, and while she is very friendly at home in her cage, she can by shy at programs. Tell the students not to make any noise when she first comes out because a cough, sneeze or any loud noise could startle her. She may bark at them as well. If students are calm and quiet, she can be great.