

**THE PRAIRIE DOG AND ITS UNINVITED GUESTS.**

The prairie dog (*Cynomys ludovicianus*) of the Missouri region, and westward and southward, belongs to a genus of American rodents intermediate between the marmots and prairie squirrels. This woodchuck in miniature is about 13 inches long, with the tail 4 inches more; the color above is reddish or cinnamon brown, with lighter tips to the hairs, and a few black ones intermixed; beneath, brownish-white or yellow; tail like the back, with a black tip. The cheek pouches are very rudimentary, the eyes large, and the ears very short. The prairie dog was probably so named from the sharp tone of its chattering, somewhat resembling the yelp of a small dog, as it bears no external resemblance whatever to the dog. It is the *petit chien* of the French Canadians, and the *wish-ton-wish* of the Western Indian.

These interesting animals live in burrows, and great numbers are found in the same locality, forming communities which the hunters call "dog towns." These villages often extend over a distance of several miles.

Before the entrance to each burrow there is a little conical mound of earth, heaped up to a height of about 18 inches, and, on the top of this, one of the occupants may usually be seen sitting, intent on watching what is going on in the community, or on the lookout for intruders. At the first alarm caused by an intruder, a general scampering takes place throughout the village, with cries of warning. Upon reaching their mounds they sit perfectly quiet, like so many sentinels, curious to know what all the commotion is about. At a further alarm they approach still closer to their entrances, ready to dive in, and appear to make vehement threats, throwing up their tails in a very comical manner with each energetic bark, accompanying this noisy chattering with a liquid gurgling sound. In a twinkling they disappear into their burrows in a ludicrous, tumbling manner, and then, after a short time, they may be seen here and there peeping out to see if the coast is clear. Like young pups, they are very clumsy in their movements, and when (as rarely occurs) they are surprised at a distance from their burrows and find they cannot escape, they assume an air of audacity, and a most singular expression of defiance or of impotent anger, before allowing themselves to be captured.

They feed chiefly at night, their food consisting almost exclusively of grass and succulent stems. In the fertile lands of Central Kansas, they sometimes prove terrible pests to the farmers in the sad havoc they make among the fields of growing corn.

Squirrel-like, they are prudent enough to lay up a full supply of provender to last them through the long and rigorous winters they often have to endure. It is said that late in summer one may frequently meet with burrows around the entrance of which, for some distance, the grass has been

neatly mown and left to cure; and that, a few days later, the hay will be found to have been cleanly gathered up and carried into the burrow.

One of the most curious things in regard to the domestic economy of this little animal is that of its strange companionship with such undesirable guests as the burrowing owl and the rattlesnake, both of which are usually found inhabiting its abode. As to the owl, it is there like other parasites, perhaps, on sufferance merely, and very little notice is taken of its presence by the dog. Yet that the presence of the intruder is not always agreeable is proved by the fact that the

are found in communities by themselves, in the deserted villages of the prairie dogs, their presence in many cases having served to drive the rightful proprietors from their dwellings.

With regard to the rattlesnake, nothing of a satisfactory nature is known as to the part he plays in the domestic arrangements of this interesting community. Mr. Kendall, in his narrative of the Santa Fé Expedition, says that the prairie dogs are "compelled to let them pass in and out without molestation." Certain it is that, although the relations of the snake with both the dog and the owl are not all friendly, they are not so inimical as would naturally be imagined. The rattlesnake seems never to be wanton; it simply defends itself from danger, or procures its food by means of its terrible fangs. This food occasionally consists of the young of the prairie dog, but probably very seldom of the full grown animal or of the owl. Small animals do not usually show much fear of these reptiles when thrown together with them, and the prairie dog will unconcernedly pass them by and enter his burrow as they lie basking in the sun at its very entrance.

Prairie dogs readily become accustomed to the haunts of man, and their villages are often found on the outskirts of populous towns. They prefer, as locations for their villages, gently sloping lands skirting valleys, yet they are often found in the tops of the highest divides, and far down near the streams, though always avoiding rocky, marshy, or even moist grounds.

**REMAINS OF GIGANTIC ANTE-DILUVIANS.**

The accompanying illustration represents some very important discoveries of gigantic fossils, which were unearthed last year in the Rocky Mountains, near Morrison, Bear Creek, Colorado, by the Rev. Arthur Lakes, Professor of Geology at Jarvis Hall, Colorado. The interest of these discoveries lies in the fact that they have been found in strata pronounced by professional geologists to be barren of vertebrate fossils. Some of these remains have been reached by blasting in the hard sandstone, and others have been dug out of a bed of soft clay lying beneath the rock, and these latter

are very perfect and of monstrous size. Thus some twenty-five colossal vertebra average from 11 to 15 inches in diameter, and one mass of vertebra, consisting of three vertebrae ossified together, measures nearly 3 feet square. Close by its side, as represented in the sketch, is another long bone, 3 feet 10 inches long and 22 inches at the butt end, possibly a scapula; but by far the most enormous bone is a portion of a femur, or thigh bone, measuring five feet in length, 28 by 12 inches in diameter, and the shaft 14 inches wide by 8 inches thick, weighing 600 lbs. Lying on the ground, like the pillar of some ancient temple, nothing can impress the observer more than this bone with the magni-

**PRAIRIE DOG, RATTLESNAKE, AND OWL.**

dog often rid himself of the nuisance by removing his own quarters to a new burrow.

There are few birds that present a more ludicrous appearance than these same burrowing owls. They spend most of their time during the day standing at the entrance of their dwellings, apparently engaged in deep contemplation. When an intruder makes his appearance, they begin a series of most ridiculous and comical bowings and courtesies, staring all the while with their great solemn eyes; and then, with a cry somewhat like the sound of a watchman's rattle, they fly to a neighboring mound and resume the same air of pensive meditation. In the majority of cases, these owls

**ANTEDILUVIAN REMAINS DISCOVERED IN THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS.**