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Prairie Dog

Cynomys ludovicianus ludovicianus



Necessities:

- Wire Cage
- Bedding
- Water bottle
- Food dish (ceramic or metal)
- Food
- Chew sticks
- Hay
- Wheel
- House
- Shelves

General:

They are incredibly social creatures that bond easily with humans and other animals. Most of the prairie dogs available for sale are black tailed prairie dogs wild-caught by hand in Texas. This has become a popular alternative to eradication by poisoning, drowning, etc. Many types of prairie dogs are now either extinct or near extinction due to these types of inhumane eradication. Although they do not reproduce well in captivity there are those who are attempting and hopefully soon (in a few years) home-raised pups will be available.

They are incredibly tenacious, demanding, destructive, oh, and did I mention very tenacious? They are kind of like a 2-year-old child with ADD. This funny, loveable, active, playful, mischievous, bossy, bratty, destructive, tenacious, gregarious, cuddly animal will keep you entertained for hours at a time. This is a VERY HIGH-INTENSITY PET! They are not a good pet for everyone. They require the devotion of the whole household. They live in huge colonies in large burrows called 'towns' and thrive in a high-stimulation household.. They do not like to live alone or be left alone. They are always on the hunt for anything they can eat, chew or make into a nest. They can chew through a wall in less than 5 minutes. They need to burrow and chew constantly! They need lots of stimulation and attention. If this all seems redundant and repetitive, good! Hopefully I am helping everyone to understand that although they are very, very cute and a heck of a lot of fun, they are a huge responsibility and will require a lot of work and understanding for them to be a good pet in your home. I love them!

Although they rarely bite, the bites that they can inflict when scared are incredibly deep. I nearly had a finger severed by a baby. Just about everything they do involves a little tooth action, called 'kissing'.

They are incredibly expressive with their vocalizations. They are said to have at least 9 distinct vocalizations. I believe there are a lot more than that. Every PD sounds different and responds vocally in a different way. They call to their owners with a bark, they can chatter at you as a warning or reprimand. They chirp, click and purr when cuddling. Each one is distinct and it's a lot of fun to figure out your PD's language.

Prairie Dogs must get spayed or neutered or they may become overly aggressive. This surgery is not inexpensive and should only be done by a exotic vet familiar with their needs.

This is a pet that every turn will try to train you to its own wants and needs and will constantly push the envelope just to see if it can. This is a pet that makes ALL cats, dogs, ferrets, monkeys and small children with ADD, ADHD and a set of quadruplets seem easy. With an average life span of 6-8 years (I knew of one that lived to be 12), they are a serious commitment.

Prairie Dogs are a USDA regulated animal. Only people who are licensed and inspected regularly are allowed to sell them. It does not require a license to own one. If you are not getting a PD from us, please make sure that the person you are getting them from is licensed. It should be posted.

Handling:

NEVER try to pick up a frightened PD! Unless you can grab it firmly on both sides of its cheeks and hold on for dear life, give it up. Allow the PD to essentially scent you. When your pup is very scared it is usually best to leave it alone for a minute or two and allow it to calm down. If I can reach around to underneath its tail to the 3 anal scent glands (these have a tendency to protrude and recede in a rather disturbing fashion) I rub my finger on them and then rub it on my hands and rub the PD's cheeks. You will notice an odor that actually changes with the different moods of your PD. Those anal scent glands protrude to give off a little gas that can signal other members of its colony.

PD's bond quickly and even what seems like the most vicious, unhandleable PD will become your best friend in a few short hours. They will love you for life. They are very scent-oriented. Changing your cologne or shampoo or any other scented product can cause your PD to not recognize you. Try to keep your pup very outgoing by keeping it very social with new people and situations. Bonding with your pup is relatively easy, by using small treats you can encourage him/her to come to you and can keep him/her distracted while you are petting its cheeks and tummy. You can also carry your pup inside a doubled shirt rubbing and petting him/her as you move about your daily routine.

The first thing you need to remember about PD's is that their olfactory glands are actually in the roof of their mouth. They smell you and put that smell into their little memory bank WITH THEIR MOUTHS OPEN, BARING THEIR TEETH AND GRABBING YOU. Any time a PD grabs you with its teeth and DOES NOT draw blood is really not a bite or nip. It's just PD behavior called 'kissing'. NEVER physically reprimand a PD. A firm "no" and a short time-out in the cage is usually the most effective. Do remember that they are tenacious and you might have to repeat the process a couple of times before it sinks in or figure out a way for the bad behavior not to be able to occur.

Exercise:

Exercise is so very important. for them. They seem to be able to become morbidly obese over night! They are very active so a metal wheel is VERY important, as are chew toys. Their teeth grow constantly so they MUST chew. Give them lots of things to chew-they can't get enough. There are wood houses and toys or compressed hay that work well for them. Dog floss toys make a wonderful chew toy and act as dental floss for their ever growing teeth. Lots of chew toys should be available and/or rotated in/out of the cage, just like kids they get bored with the same old thing. Just like kids supervise how and what your pup does with its toys, they are very mischievous and can sometimes injure themselves with even the safest toys.

They love to try to climb and I do mean try. They are incredibly clumsy! They fall off of or jump off of things a lot.. In the wild there really isn't a lot of climbing objects, in your home there is a lot. Take care, they can injure themselves with their own determination. NEVER leave them unattended! They are quick and determined.

Housing & Bedding:

We strongly recommend an ALL-metal and wire cage, no smaller than 18" x 30" for pups under 6 months and as big as you can do for older PD's. Having two cages is also very convenient. Carefresh® litter works well as a bedding (NEVER CEDAR or PINE). We also sprinkle about a tablespoon of 20 Mule Team Borax® in the bedding to help prevent mites. The cage should be totally cleaned out at least once a week using a 10% solution of bleach and water. Don't forget to also clean the food dish and water bottle. Household cleaners leave residues that can be extremely toxic – bleach solution is best. PD's are fastidiously clean and generally choose one corner or spot to go potty in. This area should be scooped out daily, or you can litterbox-train your pet by placing a small animal litterbox with kitty litter in its chosen spot. The bedding should be kept clean and dry at all times. Small animal-safe branches like apple or pear or climbing toys and nesting areas should be available. They chew EVERYTHING! Make sure that all of their toys are animal-safe.

In the wild PD's have many friends that all pile together and cuddle to get warm. In a cage by itself they are prone to getting chilled. I love using inverted clay pots with the bottom hole enlarged as a PD burrow. It helps them to conserve their body heat and tends to be very long-lasting. Getting chilled is very devastating to young PD's so your cage should be placed in a consistently warm room.

DO NOT place them near heat vents or windows. Keep them in an area of high activity and a consistent temperature of 70 degrees off of the floor. When they are young pups I slip a human heating pad just partially under one end of their small cage on LOW so they can cuddle over it for extra warmth. Remember that this is not what these heating pads are designed for so check it very regularly (every time you walk by the cage). As the PD matures this is not as necessary unless your house is cooled by temperature changes outside. A lethargic cold PD is at risk of death. On that same subject, overheating a PD is really bad also.

Temperature:

This is a very serious subject and important enough to be repeated. A cold PD is at risk of pneumonia and death, especially when very young. The room and area you keep them in must be a consistent temperature, never below 70 degrees. PD pups should be kept in an even warmer room of 72-74 degrees. Do not put them over heat vents, in front of air conditioners or in front of windows. The temperatures in those areas are not consistent.

Diet:

Prairie Dog pups are born in spring when everything is new and protein-rich. As the season progresses and the pup matures their environment becomes more scrub grass. It makes for a very unique feeding program. As pups you are constantly trying to fatten them up and as adults you are constantly trying to get them to lose weight. A thin pup is dangerous and a fat dog is a recipe for disaster.

Pups should get a diet of alfalfa hay, monkey biscuits, dry dog food (Nutro or Science Diet), Mazuri rodent blocks, sweet potato, carrots, apples, fresh greens of all types, whole oats and even seeds and nuts.

Prairie Dogs nearing 6 months of age and older should be encouraged to eat a lot more timothy, orchard or oat hay, compressed hay cubes and fresh greens. The other foods can be offered as treats or incentives for appropriate behavior.

A prairie dog's body is designed to utilize every micron of nutrition they come across and they can be almost single minded on their quest for food. Any food. Never underestimate their determination. A fat PD is at risk of lung, heart and liver failure. I once saw a PD so fat that its lungs could not expand for it to breathe. They may be cute and slower-moving when they are plump but they will also be much shorter-lived.

In the wild they drink very little water, getting most of it from vegetation. In captivity a lot of the foods fed to them are drier. You must provide them with fresh water every day. They are slow at understanding the water bottle. Use a dish set under the spout of a large rabbit water bottle attached to the outside of the cage until you are absolutely positive that your PD knows how to use it.

All food dishes should be ceramic or metal or they will not last long. I prefer a ceramic food dish so that they cannot pick it up and throw it around to get your attention. All food dishes and water bottles should be clean at all times. Remove any old greens or veggies before they spoil.

Lighting:

Prairie dogs are crepuscular, meaning they are the most active at dawn and dusk. They do not require extra lighting but it is important to have a 12/12 day-to-night cycle of light to promote good appetite and sleep cycles. Usually the normal lighting in a home is enough. If the temperature in your home is consistent, they can be active throughout the day and sleep soundly through the night.

Health and well being:

Other than obesity, getting chilled or falling and being dropped, they are a very hardy animal with relatively few known health problems. Like dogs and cats they can pick up internal and external parasites. A yearly stool sample check is recommended. Remember they will attempt to chew on and taste everything in your home, even if it's not safe or good for them. Be aware of airborne toxins and fumes such as air fresheners, incense, fumes from household cleaners, neighbors spraying insecticide, fumes from home improvements such as new carpets, paint, glues, wood floor finishes, etc. For these reasons also we do not recommend leaving your PD alone for a weekend in a closed up home. If you purchased your PD from us, we do provide boarding accommodations. If you have any questions, please give us a call. Our favorite exotic vet is Dr. Karen Obegi at 206-365-1102.

Gestation: 30 days

Birth weight: 15.5g, (1/2 oz.)

Squeak: 16 days

Walk: 37 days

Life expectancy: 8/10 years

Molt: Spring-head to tail, Fall- tail to head, tail molts once in summer

Forage: 250 prairie dogs consume as much grass per day as one 1000 lb. cow.

Mating season: late winter

Birth size: 69mm, (2.75 in.)

Furred: 3 weeks

Appear at den entrance: 6 wks

Average litter: 5 (2-10)

Birth: Early March

Eyes open: 33/37 dys

Crawl: 4 wks

Nurse: to 7 wks

One litter/ yr.