
PARALLEL CONSERVATION ISSUES ON OPPOSITE SIDES OF THE EARTH: MONTANA PRAIRIE DOGS AND TIBETAN PIKAS

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Conservation issues often occur in patterns that are replicated spatially as well as temporally. While differing in detail as well as in cultural and regulatory background, issues surrounding conservation and management of black-tailed prairie dogs (*Cynomys ludovicianus*) in central Montana resonate strongly on the far side of the world in the case of plateau pikas (*Ochotona curzoniae*) on the Tibetan Plateau, People's Republic of China. Prairie dogs are well known for their role as ecosystem engineers, facilitating the existence of many other species, yet have faced persecution for decades and even now are only grudgingly provided acceptance by policy and regulation. Unlike in North America, most species of pikas in Asia are steppe dwellers whose presence and burrowing activity provides niches for a wealth of other species. Species for which plateau pikas provide needed habitat features vary from insects to passerine birds; species that depend on them as food sources vary from the small, e.g., (*Mustela altaica*), to the large (*Ursus arctos*). Both prairie-dogs and pikas have an obligate predator, i.e., black-footed ferrets here, Tibetan foxes (*Vulpes ferrilata*) there. Beginning in the 1950s, Chinese policy called for eradication or reductions of plateau pikas, labeling them pests in language similar to that more commonly seen in the context of urban rats. Poisoning campaigns have waxed and waned, but government policy remains antagonistic to pikas even within nature reserves. Both prairie dogs and plateau pikas are keystone species, but neither yet benefits from public policy that prioritizes ecological integrity over short-term expediency.