

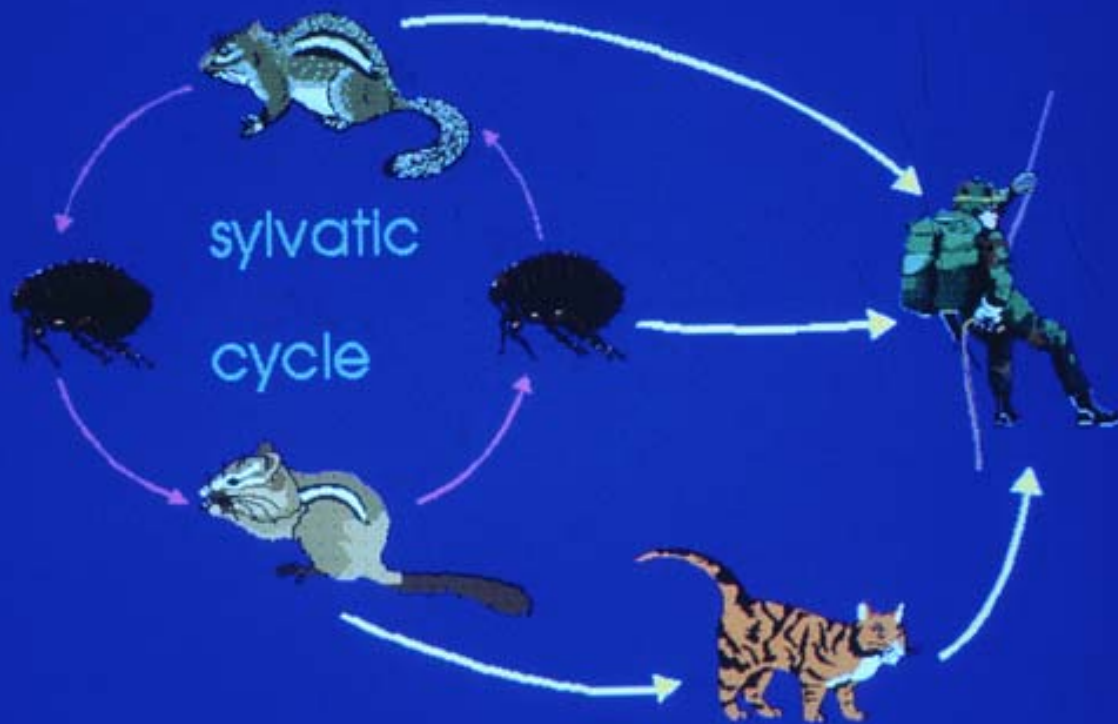
Plague and Prairie Dogs: Should We be Worried?

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Sylvatic Plague

- * Bacterial Disease transmitted by fleas
- * Most commonly found in wild rodents
 - * Can afflict other mammals, including humans
- * Prairie dogs are an ecologically important species that is highly susceptible to plague
 - * Ecological and human health impacts





Plague impacts on Wildlife

- * Plague in Prairie Dog Colonies is normally enzootic
 - * It occurs at predictable and persistent rates in the population.
- * It can become epizootic
 - * Temporarily occurring at unpredictably high rates, which can cause large population declines and increased likelihood of spread to other non-rodent mammals

Plague impacts on wildlife

- * Epizootic outbreaks can cause widespread and catastrophic declines in prairie dog populations
- * Prairie dogs are a prairie keystone species, and many other animals depend in part or in whole on them
 - * Raptors, ferrets, badgers, burrowing owls, foxes, coyotes etc
- * Of particular concern is how plague impacts the recovery of the black footed ferret.

Ferret Recovery

- * Ferrets are an endangered species entirely dependent on prairie dogs for prey and habitat.
- * The recovery of the BFF has been severely hampered by repeated plague outbreaks
- * Managing plague on the landscape is a key to recovering the ferret.



Managing plague

- * Currently plague management activities are directed mostly at flea populations or rodent populations
- * Pesticides can be applied to prairie dog and other rodent colonies to kill fleas
 - * This is preferable in areas where rodents are needed to serve their ecological functions.
- * Rodent populations can be controlled with pesticides or trapping
 - * More useful in areas adjacent to human populations.



Importance of managing plague

- * Can keep prairie dog colonies intact in areas where wildlife depends on them
- * Can help prevent transmission of disease to domestic animals and humans
- * More effective management of prairie dogs
 - * Can prevent listing of endangered species while allowing management around human habitation

Vaccine Development

- * Currently, the Black Footed Ferret Recovery Team and several other partners, including Navajo Nation are working to develop and test a sylvatic plague vaccine.
- * If approved for widespread use a vaccine will become an important tool for management of plague and rodents on the landscape.
- * Can prevent epizootics from occurring, provide population stability for ferret recovery, and allow effective management of prairie dogs where they are not desirable.



Managing plague and prairie dogs isn't just about prairie dogs!

