

Preface

On 31 July 1998, the National Wildlife Federation (NWF) petitioned the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to add the black-tailed prairie dog to the Federal List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants (FLETWP). In July 1999, I attended a two-day meeting in Denver, Colorado, regarding NWF's petition. The meeting included wildlife managers with expertise in different aspects of the biology of prairie dogs. I was there, for example, because I had studied the ecology and social behavior of prairie dogs for 15 years; Dean Biggins had evaluated methods for estimating current numbers of prairie dogs throughout their geographic range; Jack Cully was investigating the impact of plague on prairie dog populations; Pete Gober was the USFWS agent primarily responsible for handling NWF's petition; and so forth. During the meeting, I mused about the importance and utility of a book that would summarize all the available information regarding the conservation of prairie dogs.

On the return trip from Denver to my job at the University of Maryland's Appalachian Laboratory in Frostburg, Maryland, I decided to initiate such a book immediately. Within a week, however, I realized that the task was too Herculean for a single author. Recreational shooting, plague, keystone species, the Endangered Species Act (ESA), focal areas, translocations—these were only some of the pertinent topics about which I was mostly clueless. I therefore decided to edit a volume of chapters written by experts. The result is *Conservation of the Black-Tailed Prairie Dog*.

In this volume, other authors and I provide information for in-the-field biologists who are on the front lines of the battle to save the prairie dog. We also have written for local, state, and federal politicians who are trying to make responsible decisions about prairie dogs. In addition, we have aimed for the thousands of passionate, curious naturalists who are struggling to save colonies that are threatened by new supermarkets and housing developments in cities such as Boulder, Colorado, and Lubbock, Texas. Finally, we have tried to write for those ranchers and farmers who concede that prairie dogs deserve a chance.

Because so many members of our intended audience are not professional biologists, we have tried to avoid technical language and scientific jargon. But such avoidance is sometimes impossible. The glossary provides definitions for over 100 technical or semi-technical terms that we commonly use. Appendix B lists the full names for our many acronyms. We use only common names for plants and animals, but Appendix A shows the scientific names for all organisms mentioned. For those readers who want more details, we have included almost 700 references and the addresses of all authors.

For outstanding assistance with all aspects of the preparation of the manuscript, I thank Barbara Jenkins. Barb has been supremely competent with the conversions of files to the proper format, editing of tables and figures, tweaking photographs, meeting deadlines, and every other imaginable task.

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Pete Gober encouraged me to pursue *Conservation of the Black-Tailed Prairie Dog* from the outset. He helped me to select authors, and he also helped me to obtain financial support for my role as editor. Because Pete is so familiar with, and knowledgeable about, all issues regarding prairie dogs, I invited him to be a co-editor. Unfortunately, the demands of his job would not allow him to collaborate with me.

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