

Black-Tailed Prairie Dog Monitoring SAND 2006 South Dog Town

The prairie dog monitoring of Sand Creek's South Dog Town extended over a period of four days, including one day to locate the four orange stakes and three consecutive days of visual counts. The first day, which no visual counts were recorded, was taken to maximize the prairie dogs normal activity level by allowing the prairie dogs to become familiar with the presence of the vehicle and the observer on the trail road. The protocol was followed for the visual counts, but due to certain circumstances, the observer had to deviate from the protocol when locating the stakes. The observer could only locate one stake from the road, and therefore had to walk the prairie dog town to locate the others. It was later discovered that only two stakes remained in the ground and the other two were found lying on the ground. These two were replaced in the ground in the exact spot they were found. After locating the stakes, it was decided that the four stakes should be flagged with orange flags in order to be seen from the trail road. Without the flags, the orange stakes could not be seen from the road due to the height of the weeds and prairie grasses.

Notes were taken during the three days in which visual counts were recorded to help account for the different levels of prairie dog activity.

August 1, 2006

The observer arrived at the prairie dog town at approximately 0620. Visual counts began at 0700 and were conducted every 15 minutes until they were ceased by the observer at 1000. The temperature was taken upon arrival, which was recorded as 75°F. The wind speed and cloud cover were also documented, which were 3-5 mph and 1% respectively. While conducting the visual counts, 1 hawk was seen near the prairie dog

down and there were 3-5 black birds seen inside the prairie dog town. The maximum observed value for the day was 37 prairie dogs.

August 2, 2006

The observer arrived at the prairie dog town at approximately 0630. Visual counts began at 0700 and were conducted every 15 minutes until they were ceased by the observer at 1000. The temperature was taken upon arrival, which was recorded as 70°F. The wind speed and cloud cover were also documented, which were 5-7 mph and 5% respectively. The ground was damp from a light rain the night before. During visual counts, there were 3-7 cotton tails seen in the prairie dog town and 2 trucks seen driving on Rd. W. The maximum observed value for the day was 35 prairie dogs.

August 3, 2006

The observer arrived at the prairie dog town at approximately 0625. Visual counts began at 0700 and were conducted every 15 minutes until they were ceased by the observer at 1000. The temperature was taken upon arrival, which was recorded as 68°F. The wind speed and cloud cover were also documented, which were 1-2 mph and 98% respectively. There was 1 hawk seen flying over the dog town while conducting visual counts. There were also county gravel trucks going back and forth on Rd. W approximately every 20 minutes. The maximum observed value for the day was 28 prairie dogs.

Possible Explanations

There are several contributing factors that may have resulted in a possible inaccurate count of prairie dogs. On the day in which the stakes were located, the observer walking in the prairie dog town may have disturbed there normal activity level.

Although it is mentioned in the protocol that the observer should allow 24 hours before conducting visual counts after being in the prairie dog town, it is possible that that is not enough time for them to go back to normal activity. The orange flags may have disturbed the prairie dogs normal activity level as well.

When comparing the three days of visual counts, the maximum observed values for days 1 and 2 were very similar, whereas day 3 was significantly lower. When looking at the notes from the third day of visual counts, the lessened activity by the prairie dogs may have been due to the trucks going back and forth on Rd. W. The 98% cloud cover could have also contributed to the prairie dogs lower activity level, as the days in which the counts were higher were less cloudy.