



Other Viewpoints

Prairie dogs head for Nebraska home

People who have seen prairie dog exhibits like the one at the Henry Doorly Zoo in Omaha probably have wished that they could see what a real prairie dog town would look like out in the open range.

Soon they'll have a new opportunity to do just that, thanks to a plan by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission to set up a prairie dog colony in the north-central part of the state.

The commission voted 8-1 to permit the Hutton Niobrara Ranch Wildlife Sanctuary to set loose 100 wild black-tailed prairie dogs and allow them set up housekeeping on the 5,000-acre sanctuary near Bassett.

Audubon of Kansas, which owns the property, hopes that the prairie dog town will help attract tourists.

Wildlife experts refer to (prairie dogs) as a keystone species because their presence helped support populations of other animals.

Modern farming and ranching have eliminated much of prairie dogs' natural habitat.

Ranchers view them as vermin that destroy grazing land and leave the landscape dotted with holes that can snap the leg of a steer or a horse. Previous plans to limit prairie dog hunting or institute government protection stirred storms of protest.

In this case, sanctuary officials were able to defuse local opposition with a plan that includes putting an electrified fence around the 6- to 8-acre plot where the prairie dogs will be set loose, and promising to kill any prairie dogs that escape the ranch.

Ron Klatske, director of Audubon of Kansas, said that the soil surrounding the sanctuary is too sandy to support burrows. None of the five neighboring landowners opposes the plan.

Prairie dogs may have disappeared from much of the natural landscape, but prairie dog imagery lives on today. When people stand up in modern offices to look over their cubicle walls to investigate anything out of the ordinary, they are called "prairie dogs."

No wonder city folk are willing to drive a considerable distance to see the furry creatures. It's nice to see prairie dogs in their natural home for a change.

—Lincoln (Neb.) Journal Star, via the Associated Press

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Egypt's troubles tied to U.S.

While no one can forecast the effect the Egyptian revolution will have on the Middle Eastern region, it's disappointing to see the cynical way some in the media and in this town are viewing this historic event.

Many folks seem solely concerned with whether the results of the revolution will be good for the United States. This sort of cold-hearted pragmatism goes against all of our professed ideals, yet it's internalized and accepted by very same people who proudly wave the flag while denouncing anyone who questions our nation's dedication to promoting democracy in the world.

The public's lack of concern about U.S. support for dictators in Middle East stems from the view that all Muslims are primitive beasts and woman-haters who are not responsible enough to run their own countries. There is a widespread belief that our government has to support dictators in the region because, if given a chance to freely vote, Arabs would vote radical Islamists into power. This misconceived strategy has helped empower the very forces we feared.

The U.S.-backed dictators in the region have traditionally persecuted, jailed or killed all opposition to their rule, religious or secular. In Iran under the Shah, as in Egypt today under aging dictator Hosni Mubarak, the secular, pro-democratic forces were routinely tortured or jailed leaving the mosques as the only formidable opposition force left in the countries.

Even people I consider my friends have referred to Middle Easterners as idiots, savages or people who just don't think like we do.



Andy Heintz

• Wildcat Ramblings

These stereotypes successfully make Muslims seem less than human which allows the government to send military hardware to known human-rights violators without having to worry about a backlash from the public.

Not surprisingly, powerful corporate elements have profited from our nation's willingness to prop up Middle Eastern dictators. Amy Goodman, co-host of the progressive radio program "Democracy Now," said Egypt has been the largest recipient of foreign aid for decades, after Israel (not counting the money expended on wars in Iraq and Afghanistan). Mubarak's regime has received roughly \$2 billion per year since coming to power, overwhelmingly to the military.

According to Goodman, most of the money has gone to U.S. corporations.

William Hartung of the New America Foundation explained to Goodman what corporations profit from our aid deals with Egypt.

"Lockheed Martin has been the leader in deals worth \$3.8 billion over that period of 10 years," he said. "General Dynamics, \$2.5 billion for tanks; Boeing, \$1.7 billion for missiles, for helicopters; Raytheon for all manner of missiles for the armed forces. So this is a

key element in propping up the regime, but a lot of the money is basically recycled. Taxpayers could just as easily be giving it directly to Lockheed Martin or General Dynamics."

Before we dismiss the revolution in Egypt as another mindless internecine feud among Muslims, we should listen to the voices of the people courageously protesting in the streets instead of our own narrow-minded stereotypes.

Sharif Abdel Kouddous, senior producer for "Democracy Now," interviewed protesters in the streets of Cairo. Here is what a few of them had to say:

Nazly Hussein, female activist: "It's really everyone's revolution. And I think a lot of people have made it seem like it's just for radicals on either side or really a certain party, but that's not true. If you look around, there's everyone.... Women were treated with a lot of respect. I have never been treated with this much respect in Egypt, I must say. I was amazed at the Egyptian people. They have qualities that I thought they had lost. But no, they haven't."

Mahmoud Ayman, student at the faculty of engineering: "You know, I came here today to just tell the whole world we're not asking for much. All were asking for is when we vote for someone, we want that person to be in control. You know, we want our votes to go for the people we vote for. We're not asking for much."

Andy Heintz, a K-State journalism graduate, is sports reporter for the Colby Free Press. He says he loves K-State athletics and fishing, sports and opinion writing.

Dad says, 'Stay off the road' in storms

This winter is stacking up to be one we'll all remember. The eastern third of Kansas, and Riley County where I live, already has 30 inches of snow this year.

The freezing rain, and an additional six to 12 inches of new snow and wicked winds during the first week of February, brought commerce, community activities and transportation to a standstill.

When I think about the perils associated with winter travel, I think about my dad's simple, but sound advice, "Stay off the roads."

Dad lived by this creed for more than 80 years in northwestern Kansas. He'd seen his share of blowing and drifting snow. When he talked about western Kansas blizzards, the years of '31 and '57 were singled out.

The '31 blizzard hit on April Fool's Day and killed hundreds of cattle. One of Dad's neighbors lost 80 head in a pasture less than a quarter mile west of Seguin in Sheridan County.

I was just a youngster, but I remember the blizzard of '57. Snow drifted as high as the roof on my friend Vernon Rietcheck's two-story home. We sledded down the drifts and played in the snow for three days.

Our parents weren't as lucky. There were roads to open and cattle to feed and water. Our homes were without electricity for five days.

My father and those hearty souls living on the High Plains learned from these storms. He learned to travel only when necessary — to feed, water and care for his livestock. He never went anywhere in his pickup without several pairs of gloves, a scoop shovel, a log chain and chains for the rear tires.

One thing they didn't do was drive while a



John Schlageck

• Insights

Kansas Farm Bureau

winter storm was in progress if they could at all help it. Few events or activities were so important they couldn't wait until the snow had finished falling. Whether they could wait until the winds died down, that was another story.

Dad always wore a cap with ear protection and carried a couple of extras on the front seat of his pickup during the winter. The trunk of our car also had extras. He knew a person couldn't last long outside in freezing weather with body heat escaping through a bare head.

If we went anywhere during the winter, the trunk of the family car was always packed with extra warm clothes, blankets, overalls, gloves, a flashlight, fresh batteries, chains and a shovel to clear the snow from in front of the tires.

Dad had been stuck in snow before. He'd heard of, and known of, people who were stranded and froze to death in some of the fierce northwestern Kansas blizzards. Before every winter season began, and often throughout, he'd remind us of these stories.

My father always topped off his fuel tanks for winter travel. He believed a full tank provided extra weight on the rear wheels.

"It runs better on the top half (of the tank)," he always said.

Although Dad never carried sand bags in the

back of his car or trucks, he did carry extra weight during the winter. He always lugged around tractor tire weights while some of his neighbors preferred sand and sprinkled the gritty stuff in front of their tires for extra traction in snow and ice.

If someone absolutely had to go out during a winter storm, Dad preached extra time and patience. If you're frightened or overly concerned about weather conditions, he'd say, don't drive. Wait the storm out.

Remember, it takes a while to find your "driving legs" each new winter season, he'd say.

Relax. Sit back in the seat. From time to time take deep breaths. Don't grip the wheel until your knuckles turn white.

Try to anticipate what other drivers intend to do. Let them speed, spin, slip and slide. Allow at least twice as long to reach your destination. Concentrate on the road ahead, behind and on your right and left.

While driving during hazardous weather brings out the worst in some drivers, it can also bring out the best in others. Some welcome the chance to brave the elements. To drive safely under such conditions can provide a feeling of satisfaction and accomplishment.

Drive safely and know your limitations. Remember, if you have to take a chance that could result in an accident or worse, "Stay off the road."

John Schlageck of the Kansas Farm Bureau is a leading commentator on agriculture and rural Kansas. He grew up on a diversified farm near Seguin, and his writing reflects a lifetime of experience, knowledge and passion.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

