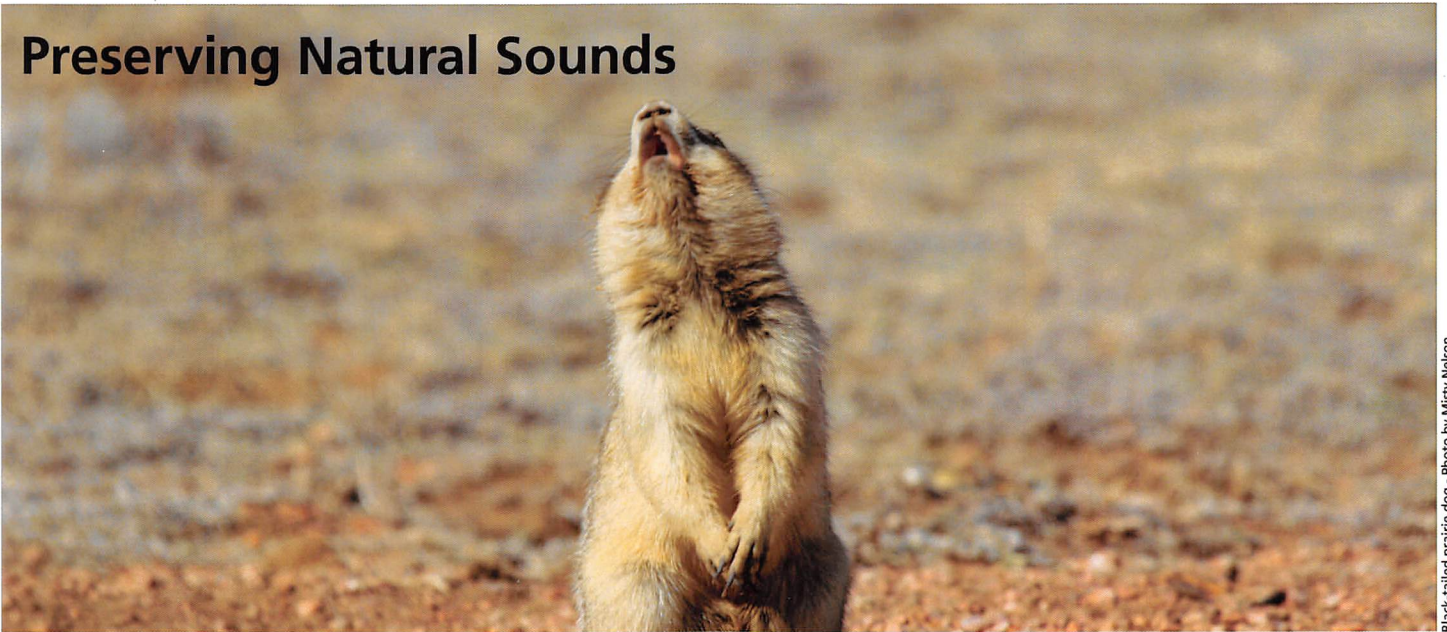




Preserving Natural Sounds



Black-tailed prairie dog - Photo by Misty Nelson

Close your eyes. What do you hear? Wind? Rustling leaves? Birds singing? Flowing water? An animal moving through vegetation?

Listening to Nature

The sounds we hear in our national parks take us away from buzz of our daily lives and place us in the serene beauty of nature. In fact, 95% of Americans say one of the most important reasons for preserving national parks is to provide opportunities to experience natural peace and the sounds of nature.

Just as natural quiet in national parks is enjoyable to us, sound is necessary for the survival of the birds, insects, and other animals. The acoustical environment is filled with sounds animals use to establish territory, find mates, nurture and protect their young, and communicate.

Acoustical Environment

The acoustical environment at Devils Tower National Monument includes a variety of sounds across a diverse landscape.

Falcons

Devils Tower provides nesting habitat for both prairie falcons and peregrine falcons. In summer 2014, two peregrine falcon nestlings fledged from their nest (“aerie”) on the west face of the Tower. As you explore the Tower, you may hear the falcons vocalizing above.

Black-tailed Prairie Dogs

Perhaps the most conspicuous prairie dog communication is the territorial call, or “jump-yip” display. A prairie dog will stretch the length of its body vertically and throw its forefeet into the air while making a call. A jump-yip from one prairie dog causes others nearby to do the same. This entertaining vocalization and display is just one of several communication calls that prairie dogs use.

Bats

Devils Tower National Monument is home to at least ten species of bats, each with a unique echolocation call. Most of the bats that live here vocalize at such high frequencies that they cannot be heard without monitoring equipment that slows the call down to a frequency that humans can hear. Bats use echolocation to find objects and food sources by emitting high frequency sounds that are reflected back toward their specialized ears.

Amphibians

There are six species of amphibians at Devils Tower National Monument, five of which are audible. You may hear the nasal “waaaah!” of the Woodhouse’s toad when a male vocalizes for a mate. The call of a boreal chorus frog sounds like a fingernail being dragged across a comb: “Creee!”



Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) at nest. USFWS Photo.



Woodhouse's Toad (*Anaxyrus woodhousii*). NPS Photo.

Preserving the Acoustical Environment

Inevitably, some noise slips into a park's acoustical environment. Park maintenance operations must use vehicles to remove garbage or chain saws to remove dangerous trees. Visitors need vehicles to travel from one part of the park to another. Since parks were created in part for people's enjoyment, a certain degree of noise is appropriate. However, when noise intrudes on the ability of park visitors to enjoy their visit or inhibits

an animal's survival, the National Park Service works to minimize these impacts. The National Park Service incorporates the protection of park acoustical environments into all forms of park management plans. We also examine our operations and make equipment choices and operating times that minimize interference with wildlife activity and visitors enjoying the park.

Making a Difference

The great thing about the acoustical environment is that small actions can make a dramatic difference. Here are some tips:

- Be aware that the noise you make could affect other visitors.
- Look for mute options on electronic equipment such as cell phones, or cameras.
- Turn off cell phones and avoid using speakerphones.
- Participate in non-motorized recreational activities (i.e., hiking, birdwatching).
- Remember that quieter hikers tend to see more wildlife.

Enjoy a Quieter Ride

- Turn off car alarms and disable sounds on electronic door locks.
- Use park shuttles.

- Turn off vehicle engines when stopped at wildlife traffic jams, overlooks, or pullouts.
- Turn off radios and open windows to hear interesting park sounds.
- Drive at posted speed limits (driving faster creates more noise).
- Don't rev it up! Ride motorcycles respectfully in parks.

Plan for the Future

- Reduce exhaust noise by replacing faulty mufflers or installing quieter models.
- Motorcyclists should avoid riding in large groups through the park.
- Reduce and repair vehicle rattles and other problems that cause excessive noise.