



Photo courtesy of John Deal

Community Efforts

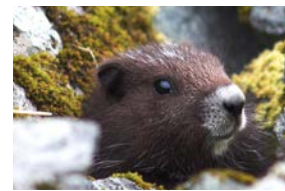
See how others are helping the marmots...

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An Elk, a Trough and a... Marmot?

A very moving story...

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Adopt me for Xmas!

THE MARMOTEER

Newsletter of The Marmot Recovery Foundation

Issue 26 Fall 2011

www.marmots.org

2011 Highlights From the Wild

- 20 litters (68 pups) born in the wild!
- 3 colonies reestablished in the southern core!
- 2 litters born in Strathcona Park!
- 67 marmots released to multiple sites!

Extreme weather two years in a row threatened to undermine the gains in the wild – but the marmots have shown they're made of tougher stuff.

Survival of *established* marmots (captive or wild-born marmots with 1+ hibernation experience in the wild) was excellent. And a record 68 pups were born in spite of the extreme conditions!

Progress has continued in the south. Green Mountain, Haley Lake and Heather Mountain are all fine examples of *reestablished* colonies with 12+ marmots and consecutive years of breeding. These colonies have also received dispersing marmots from other fledgling sites and emigrated marmots out to other sites. In other words, they're starting to function like natural colonies.

The record conditions were challenging for newly released marmots. Hibernation related mortality in this group was high for a 2nd year. We're conducting *preconditioning* test releases at Mt Washington this year to see if the survival of the inexperienced marmots can be improved. (see page 2)

The litters born in Strathcona Park are beacons of hope! Persistent releases in the Park are needed to ensure enough animals survive there for breeding to take hold and the population to take root.

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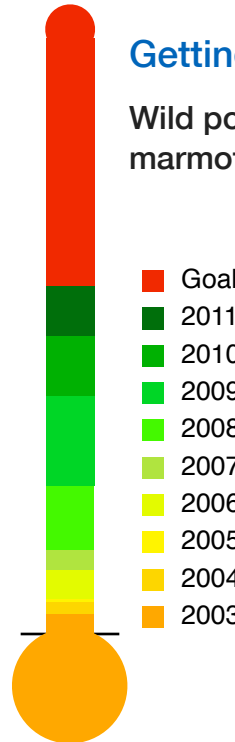
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Getting Closer... But Not There Yet

Wild population estimated at 330-370 marmots!



Photo courtesy of Jared Hobbs
www.hobbsphotos.com

Losses were primarily in the central and northern regions. As the focus of the majority of releases over the last 2 years, these regions were almost entirely composed of newly released animals at the same time their survival was compromised.

Rebuilding these historic populations is the last hurdle of the Recovery Strategy and a final step to seeing the marmots safely recovered in the wild. Without more successful colonies (like Green, Haley and Heather) established in other parts of the marmots' historic range the species will remain vulnerable to random events and the threat of extinction.

Marmot Captive Breeding Program Wins Prestigious Conservation Award!

Congratulations to our partners at the **Calgary** and **Toronto zoos** for winning the prestigious **North American Conservation Award**. Presented by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums for their exceptional efforts toward species restoration for their participation in the Vancouver Island marmot captive breeding program!

Along with Mountain View Conservation Centre, a private facility in Langley BC, the zoos have been an

integral part of the recovery efforts.

A total 493 pups have been born in captivity - 98 at Calgary, 97 at Toronto, 104 at Mountain View and 194 at the Tony Barrett Mt Washington Marmot Recovery Centre.

A cornerstone of the Recovery Strategy, released captive born marmots have helped rebuild the wild population from a low of 26 known animals in the wild - to the 330-370 we estimate in the wild today.



Marmot Crew At Work

an interview with Cheyney Jackson

In her 5th year as marmot field crew, Cheyney is completing her master's degree at UBC (studying the Vancouver Island marmot, of course!)

What attracted you to the marmot program?

As a child, I was always rescuing things. Ducks, squirrels, voles, small birds – if it was injured I tried to help. With the marmots, I can help an entire species recover. That has national and even global significance.

Can you explain why the Recovery Team decided to feed the marmots in the wild colony at Mt Washington?

The goal was to see if we could increase the number of pups born by improving the spring body condition of the adults. But first we had to build a feeder that would work in the alpine conditions and then see if the marmots in the wild would even use them.

How do the feeders work?

The feeders were designed by project veterinarian, Malcolm McAdie, to be both simple to install and maintain. As food is removed, gravity forces more food down to replace it. However, the marmots liked to give the feeders an additional shake now and then to see if they could help the food come out even faster!

How were the feeders monitored?

Every autumn, field crew “put the marmots to bed.” This involves tracking individual marmots to their hibernaculum so we know where to find them in the spring. As soon as the marmots “woke up” and dug out through the snow, we set up a feeder for them. The feeders were tethered so they would stay in place but were still able to move with the melting snow.

Every few days, crew hiked to the burrows with backpacks stuffed full of marmot food to refill the feeders and record how much food was eaten. Remote cameras were used to be sure it was the marmots eating the food. We caught some very funny video of marmots fending off squirrels and jays and once, even a black bear! (That feeder was immediately removed.)

Do you think the tests were successful?

The grad student in me knows nothing can be proven

– Supplemental Feeding Tests

feeders succeeded on several levels.

First, the marmots used them! That shows that if food is provided, even in our funny-looking feeders, the marmots will eat it. Plus we saw the boon of pups we were hoping for – 5 litters totaling at least 17 pups – in spite of the extreme spring conditions.

In similar conditions last year 0 pups were born. And in the previous two years the largest number of pups was 9. And there were other surprises too!

A litter was born to an 11-year old female, a very mature age for a wild marmot to have pups, and a 9-year old female produced her first litter ever!

So while it may be too early for concrete conclusions, initial observations are very positive.



Marmots at the wild colony at Mt Washington taking part in a supplemental feeding test.

Was feeding done elsewhere?

One other mountain in the Nanaimo Lakes region was part of our feeder trial. For several years, this colony numbered less than 10 marmots. This year, multiple litters were observed totaling 10-14 pups, and that's not even counting the adults!

What are obstacles to supplemental feeding at other colony sites?

Getting to the marmot colonies in the spring is a huge issue. Without multi-day hikes many are accessible only by helicopter. This would make it incredibly expensive as well as impractical, since we could only fly in good weather – and we all know how often we had good weather this past spring!

Finally, safety is a big concern. Marmots live in or near avalanche chutes because avalanches prevent trees from taking over their meadows and the steepness of the terrain helps with early spring melt. This also makes it extremely dangerous for humans in the spring when the snow is unstable. Not to mention the feeders would be swept right off the mountains or buried in snow.

We're very lucky to have a site like Mt Washington where we have easy access to the wild marmot colony. If the supplemental feeding tests are successful, the boon pups can be translocated to other fledgling sites.

The potential benefits of supplemental feeding will be tested further in 2012 to see if survival of newly released marmots can be improved. If tests are positive, it may be possible to *precondition* released marmots at Mt Washington and then trans-locate them to other wild colony sites after they have proven hibernation survival.

It takes a community to save a species



Graeme, Ally, Justin, Rahana and Sunny, Bachelors of Commerce students at **Royal Roads University** on Vancouver Island, raised over \$1,500.00 for the marmots in the university's **2011 Venture Challenge**.

The *Venture Challenge* is a funds and awareness raising contest between students for charitable campaigns of their choice.

Team Marmot used a variety of fundraising techniques - like selling marmot droppings (made of chocolate) at the local mall - to win first place at the Awards Gala!



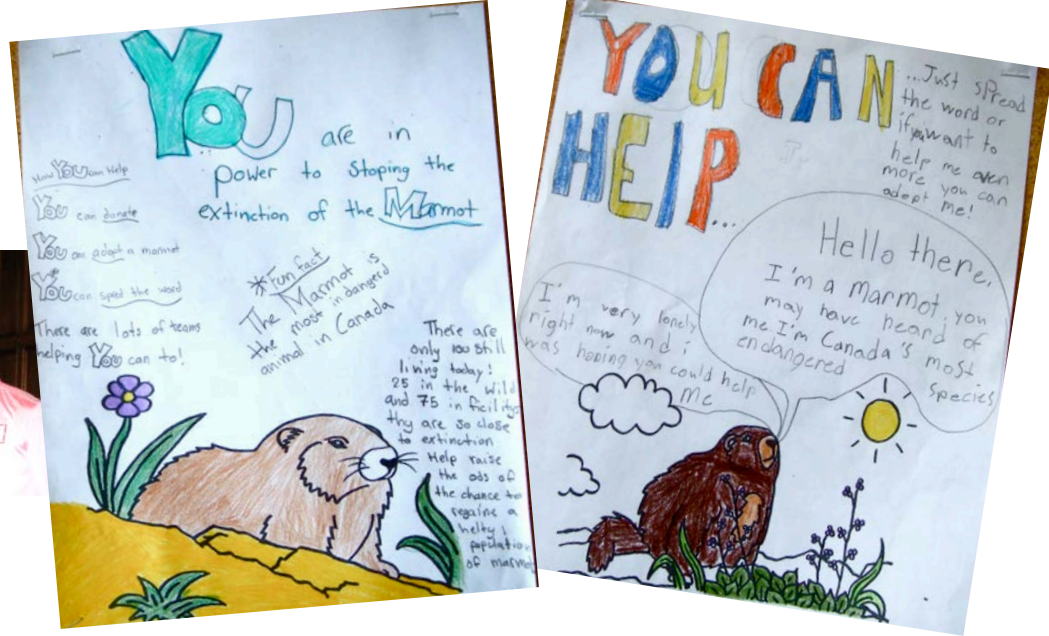
Glen Husband, president of the TELUS Ambassadors Nanaimo Branch, presents a big cheque to Don Doyle, Chair of the Marmot Recovery Team from the **TELUS Employees Matching Contributions Program**.



Kelli Etheridge, of *Etheridge Photographic* sent proceeds from a special **Groundhog Day photo session** to help

the marmots. See Kelli's amazing baby photos at

www.etheridgephotographic.com



Jessica Barrett had a great idea to help her students understand the significance of locale in the habitats unit of her **Grade 4 Science class** at **Withrow Avenue Junior Public School**.

After exploring Canada's most endangered mammal, her students were asked to design educational posters with their findings. As you can see, the results were fantastic! And to top it off, donations were made in each student's name. Thank you Room 342!



Kohl Lang, Michael Sherinian and Nick Sinclair all the way from Dowling Catholic School in **Des Moines, Iowa** were amazed when they saw a common groundhog one day during Biology class. The boys were so intrigued they researched further to find that groundhog's are members of the marmot family and they all share the nickname "Whistle Pig" based on their shrill calls. They also discovered the groundhog's cousin, the Vancouver Island marmot, is critically endangered.

The boys jumped into action to create a Facebook page called "**Save the Whistle Pigs**" and let people know about the perils the marmots face. And they raised funds to help by selling "Save the Whistle Pigs" wristbands – they sold 200 wristbands in two days! Way to go boys!

2010 Name a Pup Contest Winners!

Adella, Apollo, Audrey, Billy, Boulder, Drifter, Cinamin, Charlie, Copper, Flash, Garbo, Mith, Mozart, Pearl, Ruth, Salvador, Sweet Sam, Tashi, Tika, and Tulip. May their names bring them good fortune!

Did you enter the 2011 draw?

(Details in our fall special mailing)

Recovery of the Vancouver Island marmot relies upon the individual support of hundreds of caring individuals like you. Collectively, we can make a difference.

Thank you to each and every one of you for your support!

A Compassionate Hart... er Elk

Daily Mail, July 1, 2011

Keepers at the Pocatello Zoo in Idaho were worried when they noticed Shooter, a 4-year-old, 10 foot tall elk, acting strangely at his water trough.

Baffled, they watched as the animal – who is so massive some of his keepers are afraid to even enter his enclosure – tried to dip his hooves into his drinking trough, before attempting to dunk his whole head in the water. They were truly amazed when he lifted his head with a tiny marmot held between his jaws.

The gentle giant placed the marmot down and nudged it with his hoof, as if checking it for signs of life, before calmly watching it scamper off into the bushes. All caught on camera by zoo staff.

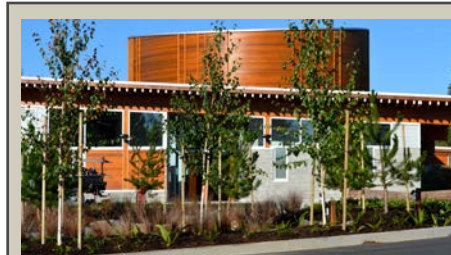
“He was trying to dunk his head in the water but his antlers kept getting in the way. Nobody could figure out why he was trying to get his head in and then he started dipping his feet in,” said one of the keepers.

“We were all completely confused until we saw the marmot in his mouth. I think he nudged the animal away from the edge of the trough with his antlers and

hooves so he could reach it with his mouth without his antlers getting in the way.”

This lucky little marmot in Idaho is cousin to our Vancouver Island marmot and one of the six marmot species found in North America. Another eight are found in Europe – for a total 14 marmot species in the world.

As its name suggests, the Vancouver Island marmot is the only marmot found exclusively in Canada and the only marmot on the endangered species list. With your help – we can change that!



Sneak Preview!

Have you been wondering what the heck that new building is at exit 117 on the Inland Island Highway?

Set to open next spring, this state-of-the-art Visitor's Centre, designed by Aldrich Pears, will feature interactive Alpine, Ocean, Agriculture and Forest themed displays and videos to showcase the many attractions found in Comox Valley to the world. We are especially excited a replica marmot burrow, large enough to crawl through and get a first hand look at what living underground would be like, will be part of the many features you will find there. Watch for special coverage on the Visitors Centre in our next issue of the Marmoteer.

Marmot Recovery Foundation

Vancouver Island

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Email: marmots@telus.net
Website: www.marmots.org

Yes, I want to help recover our uniquely Canadian marmot with my special gift!

Enclosed is my donation of:

\$25 \$50 \$100 \$500 Other \$_____

NAME _____

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CITY _____ PROVINCE _____ POSTAL CODE _____

I prefer to pay by:

Cheque payable to the Marmot Recovery Foundation
 Visa Mastercard

CARD NUMBER _____

EXPIRY DATE ____/____/____

SIGNATURE _____

I would like to join the Adopt-a-Marmot Club!



I will receive a poster and official adoption certificate and help our marmots year round with my monthly pledge of:

\$10 \$15 \$20 \$25 Other \$_____

I authorize the Marmot Recovery Foundation to deduct the above amount each month from my bank account by personal cheque (marked VOID)

or

by credit card (please provide card information at left).

I understand I can change or cancel my pledge at any time.

Special Gift Adoptions

I want to adopt a marmot as a gift for a friend with
 a one time donation of \$120 or
 my monthly pledge (above)

Please mail the tax receipt to my address and send a gift letter and adoption package to:

GIFT NAME _____

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Thank you for your support!