

Press Release
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"HERMAN" THE ENDANGERED VANCOUVER ISLAND MARMOT PREDICTS EARLY SPRING

Wednesday, February 2, 2011: On a very snowy Groundhog Day, there is a silver lining around those snow-filled clouds. Toronto Zoo's "Herman", Vancouver Island marmot (VIM) and groundhog kinfolk, has predicted that we will welcome an early spring this year. Media were on hand at the Zoo this morning as "Herman" broke tradition slightly by allowing his appetite to direct his weather prediction. Herman chose between two signs which stated the weather forecasts, each with Herman's favourite treat of cauliflower and kale. Just after 10:00am this morning, Herman officially predicted that we can get ready to pack up our winter wardrobes! Visit torontozoo.com to see a video of Herman making his prediction.

The VIM is one of the most critically endangered animals in the world, and is Canada's MOST endangered mammal. The Toronto Zoo has been involved in the conservation of these rare animals since 1996, when it was first approached by the Marmot Recovery Foundation to begin a captive breeding and release program. Within the last 10 years, the entire VIM population had plummeted by 90%. Because of significant captive breeding efforts, including the Toronto Zoo's, the wild population has successfully grown. The Toronto Zoo is also involved in many research projects to help increase our understanding of this unique mammal and has spearheaded studies on mating behaviour, pup development and hormone analysis for monitoring reproductive cycles of breeding females. This information is vital to ensure that the VIM experiences a triumphant return to the wild.

"The VIM is one of the rarest mammals in North America with the wild population being as low as 20-25 individuals. Captive breeding and reintroduction has been crucial in preventing this species from becoming extinct," says Maria Franke, Curator of Mammals, Toronto Zoo. "There have been a total of 126 litters and 442 weaned pups since the first pups were born in captivity in 2000. This captive success has allowed 308 marmots to be released back to the wild and now the wild population is estimated at 270-320 animals. This is a huge step in the right direction in saving this truly Canadian species," says Franke.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) currently lists the VIM (*Marmota vancouverensis*) as critically endangered. This is a result of habitat alteration due to human activity. Clear-cutting practices are affecting wild dispersal, road construction is allowing easier predator access and climate change is impacting their subalpine habitat on Vancouver Island, B.C.

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