

## VANCOUVER ISLAND MARMOT FACT SHEET

*Marmota vancouverensis*

**Vancouver Island Marmots at Toronto Zoo:** The Zoo currently has 9 male marmots, 6 females and 11 pups. A total of 20 pups have been born here, with 11 births in 2004. The Vancouver Island marmots are in a restricted breeding facility and are not on display to the public.



**Description:** This species, members of the squirrel family, has shiny chocolate brown fur with white on the muzzle and abdomen.

**Distribution and Habitat:** They are only found on Vancouver Island in forest clearings and alpine slopes with a southern exposure. Burrows, dug between rocks, provide protection from predators.

**Length:** Body: 300 to 600 mm. Tail: 100 to 250 mm.

**Weight:** From 3 to 7.5 kg.

**Adaptations:** They have a "pecking order" lead by adult males. Marmots are true hibernators - for 6 months the entire family of 15 or so animals huddle together. When outside temperatures drop below freezing, their body temperature can drop to 4.5 - 7.5°C. Every 3-4 weeks they awaken to defecate and urinate.

**Reproduction:** Most animals do not breed until their fourth summer. Litters of up to 3 young are born after a gestation period estimated at 30 days. They may reproduce only every second year.

**Wild Diet:** Vancouver Island marmots are herbivores, feeding on more than 50 plant species. During the spring they feed on berries, roots, bark, and on grasses and early-blooming flowers. During the summer they eat flowers, berries, grasses and leaves.

**Zoo Diet:** A variety of leafy green vegetables, including romaine lettuce, dandelion greens and kale, as well as cobs of corn, yams, and other vegetables.

**Status: CRITICALLY ENDANGERED.** Their rapid decline may be due to forestry, which has concentrated them in small areas, making them more vulnerable to predators, disease, and changes in climate and vegetation.