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The Tree Nursery

VANCOUVER ISLAND MARMOT

GEOHERMAL ENERGY

Turkey Vulture



Photo by Crystal Reid

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"Young Naturalists Observe and Conserve"

THE OLYMPICS ARE COMING!

LET'S HEAR IT FOR MUKMUK, THE VANCOUVER ISLAND MARMOT.

TRUE OLYMPIAN MAKES AMAZING COMEBACK!

Excitement abounds as the 2010 Winter Olympics approach. Young British Columbians and children around the world wonder if a Vancouver Island Marmot, named *Mukmuk*, will attend the festivities. Right now, the only Olympic mascots are *Quatchi* (representing Sasquatch), *Sumi* (who flies with Thunderbird wings) and *Miga* (part sea-bear, part whale). *Mukmuk*, the only character based on a live British Columbia animal, is designated as a sidekick, not an official mascot.

As Canada's most endangered mammal, the Vancouver Island Marmot deserves celebration. It is endemic to Vancouver Island and does not occur anywhere else in the world. There are only five land mammal species endemic to Canada, making the Vancouver Island marmot very special indeed.

This marmot was first discovered in 1910. Its numbers have declined greatly due to landscape changes and altered predator-prey relationships. But things



6 The beautiful marmot reserve. Photo by David Reid.

VANCOUVER ISLAND MARMOT

By Crystal Reid,
Marmot Shepherd

are looking up - from fewer than 30 in 2003, there are now between 140 and 160 Vancouver Island marmots in the wild.

I came to know the Vancouver Island Marmot when I was hired as a 'marmot shepherd' for Vancouver Island marmots in 2004. It's a hard job, but so much fun!

It might surprise you to know that marmots can engage in a variety of Olympic sports. They can swim; they can stand on their hind legs and box each other; they can quickly climb near-vertical rocks; and with their noses, they can push boulders the size of their own bodies. They can also travel fast over long distances. Swimming, climbing, boxing, long distance hikers - these marmots are true Olympians!



Crystal with telemetry equipment - which can be used to find the marmots. Photo by David Reid.

Marmot bodies are amazing. From mid-September to mid-April, they do not eat. Imagine not eating at all during the coldest months of the year! Though they sleep for most of the winter in their burrows under the snow, they sometimes get up to urinate and may disturb family and friends sleeping with them. During hibernation their heart rate is as low as 3 to 4 beats per minute but it goes up to 110 when they awake and then to over 200 in the summer!

How did Vancouver Island Marmots make a comeback? For one thing, they fly! Well, they don't fly like *Sumi* but like real Olympians, in airplanes. Vancouver Island Marmots are raised in the Toronto Zoo, Calgary Zoo and the Mountain View Conservation and Breeding Centre in BC. These breeding centres help Vancouver Island Marmots raise healthy families and when the young marmots are big enough they are flown home to Vancouver Island.

While athletes train for the Olympics at Mount Washington Alpine resort, Vancouver Island Marmots coming from breeding centres also train at Mount Washington. To prepare for independent living, marmots must acclimatize to local weather and elevation for at least a year before being released into

the wild. Just like the Olympians, the marmots love the ski hills!

This acclimatization is all part of the Vancouver Island Marmot National Recovery Plan, started in 1994. Happily, the Plan is on target - reproduction, hibernation survival, appropriate habitat use, weight gain over the summer, social behaviour and recognizing predators - all are developing well.

Many years and many resources have gone towards this project. The main supporters have been the BC Government (including the BC Conservation Corps), Timberwest, Island Timberlands, BC Hydro Bridge Coastal Fish and Wildlife Restoration Program, Mount Washington Alpine and Ski Resort, BC Wildlife Federation and people like you. Last

year, WWF-Canada and Environment Canada paid for tracking devices for the marmots.

It is so important that this support continues. The marmots really need us. With help from everyone, we can build on current numbers and reach the goal of 400-600 marmots in the wild which should be a self-sustaining population.

Quatchi, *Sumi* and *Miga* are based on animals of fantasy. Let's hope that the Vancouver Island marmot remains, by contrast, a reality. If *Mukmuk* was a true mascot, every Olympics visitor would know about Vancouver Island Marmots and they would say "The world cannot let such a beautiful creature disappear!"



A marmot whistling - a sound that can be used to warn other marmots of danger. Photo by Crystal Reid..



Photo by Crystal Reid..

Crystal Reid, B.Sc. has been captivated by animals from a child. She started volunteering at an early age to help animals. Since then she has worked with animals in the United States and Canada, including cougars, wolves, caribou, various fish species and two species of marmots - Olympic Marmots (*Marmota olympus*) and Vancouver Island Marmots (*Marmota vancouverensis*). She has an Honours status in her Post-Baccalaureate/Diploma Certificate in Fish and Wildlife Technology.