

Saving a species.
One animal at a time.

2024
ANNUAL REPORT
SUMMARY



MARMOT
RECOVERY FOUNDATION

Message from the Chair

Sean Pendergast is the Chair of the Marmot Recovery Foundation and the Vancouver Island Marmot Recovery Team. A professional biologist, he has been deeply involved with the marmot recovery project for over 20 years.

The past year has been incredible for the Vancouver Island marmot. It started with a record 107 wild pups, and ended with a record 381 marmots documented living in the wild.

These numbers may not be large, but they are meaningful for a species that was once hair's breath away from extinction. I recall being on the field team in 2003, searching empty mountains for signs of marmots that no longer lived there. That year, we could only find 22 marmots. It is with that experience in mind that I celebrate this year's numbers and the return of marmots to so many mountains from which they had been lost.

But I also know that our work is not yet complete. Our mission is to recover the species, and while 2024 has been a milestone year, we have further to go to achieve that goal.

Recovering a species so close to extinction is a staggering amount of work, and it would not be possible without the Foundation's staff, our partners in research and action, and you – the people whose gifts work this work possible.

Please accept my heartfelt gratitude for your support and for making it possible to return this special animal to our mountains. I hope you will celebrate this remarkable year with us and join us on the journey ahead.

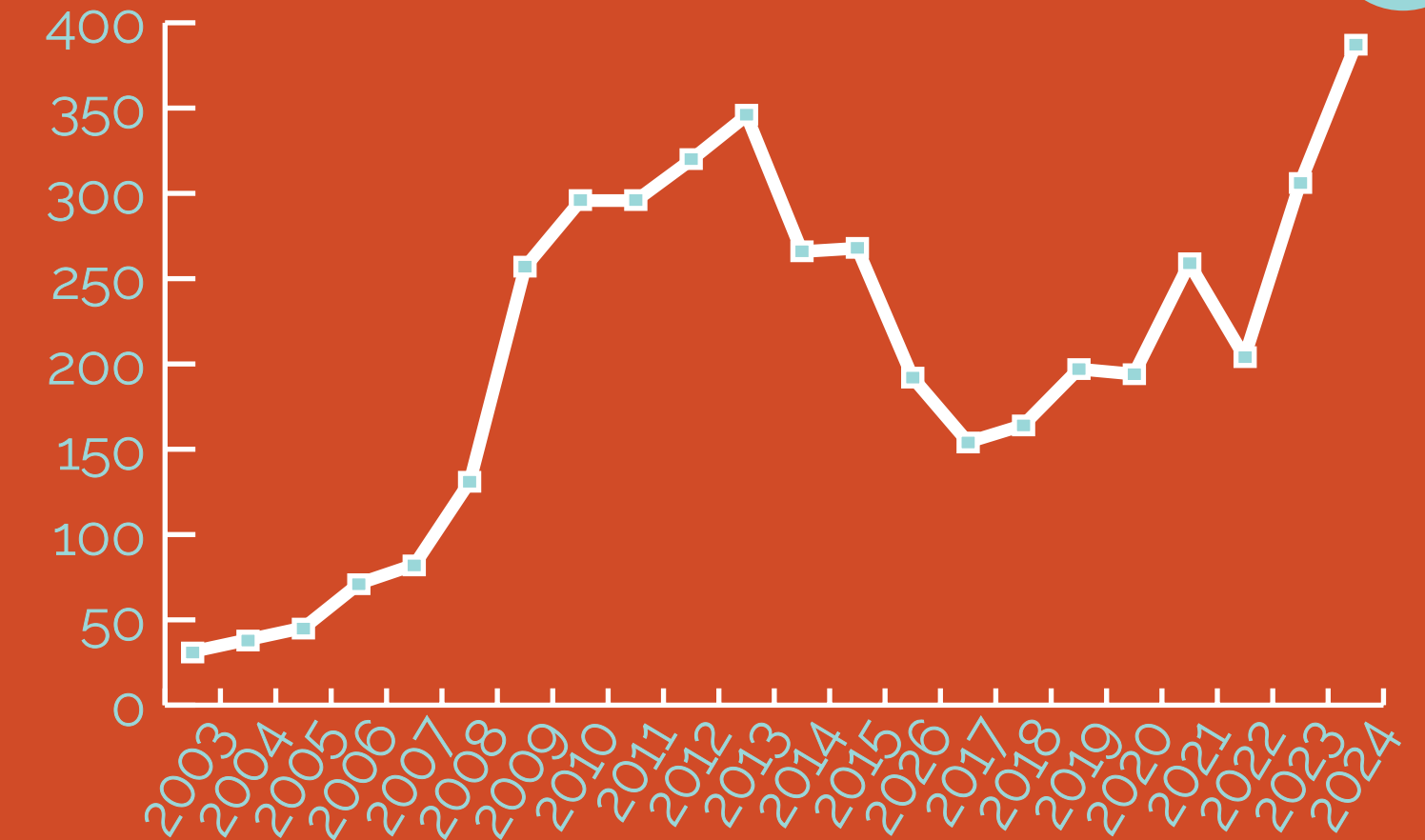
Sean Pendergast
Chair, Marmot Recovery Foundation
Chair, Vancouver Island Marmot Recovery Team

A Species in

Recovery

Wild population reaches new high

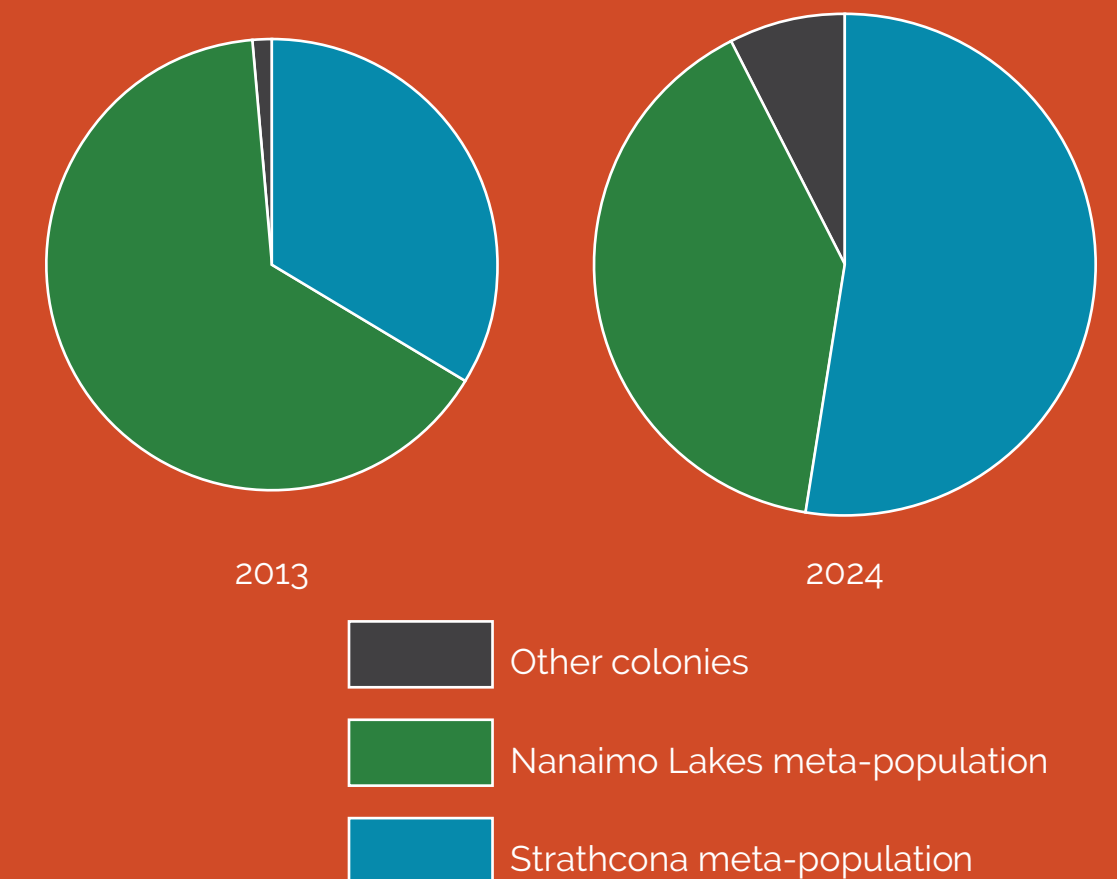
The wild-living population of Vancouver Island marmots rose to 381 individuals in 2024 - the highest number in 45 years, since counts began.



Marmots reclaiming their former habitat

By the 1980s, marmots had been extirpated from Strathcona Provincial Park.

In 2024, for the first time since reintroduction began, the Strathcona meta-population now accounts for the majority of the wild population.



RELEASING MARMOTS FROM THE CONSERVATION BREEDING PROGRAM



Conservation breeding has been a core part of recovery efforts since 2003, when the first captive-bred marmots were released to the wild. Since then, the wild population of Vancouver Island marmots has grown from fewer than 30 to 381 this year. The Marmot Recovery Foundation, the Toronto Zoo, and the Wilder Institute/Calgary Zoo each maintain a conservation breeding population, and the Foundation releases all marmots to the wild.

In 2024, we released 67 Vancouver Island marmots to wild colonies at Mount Washington, the Nanaimo Lakes meta-population, and Clayoquot Plateau Provincial Park.

SUPPLEMENTAL FEEDING TO PROMOTE OVERWINTER SURVIVAL AND REPRODUCTION

Supplemental feeding is intended to help marmots recover quickly from hibernation. This is particularly important for reproductive-aged females and captive-bred marmots experiencing their first wild hibernation.

Vancouver Island marmots are extreme hibernators. They remain underground living entirely on their body reserves for seven months. During this time they will lose 30% of their body mass and emerge from hibernation in the spring emancipated and hungry. However, food is not yet abundant in the marmot's sub-alpine habitat, where only patches of snow have melted enough to expose vegetation. For females, early, easy access to food may mean the difference between being able to support a litter of pups or skipping a year of reproduction.

In 2024, the Foundation 36 feeders to 23 colonies, targeting areas near the hibernacula of adult females.



MONITORING THE WILD POPULATION

Monitoring the wild marmot population underpins all our recovery work. Knowing where the marmots are, who they are, and their challenges and successes makes our work more informed and more effective. The Foundation uses visual surveys, remote wildlife cameras, and radio-telemetry to keep tabs on wild marmots living in remote and rugged ecosystems.

In 2024, the Foundation monitored Vancouver Island marmots living in a record colonies.

TRANSLOCATIONS TO GROW THE STRATHCONA META-POPULATION

A translocation occurs when a marmot living in the wild is moved by our team to a new wild colony. This happens when marmots are found in unsuitable habitat, or as part of our "stepping stone" program that helps marmots born in the conservation breeding program adapt to life in the wild. Translocations are especially important for the Strathcona meta-population, where wild-living experience is critical for survival.

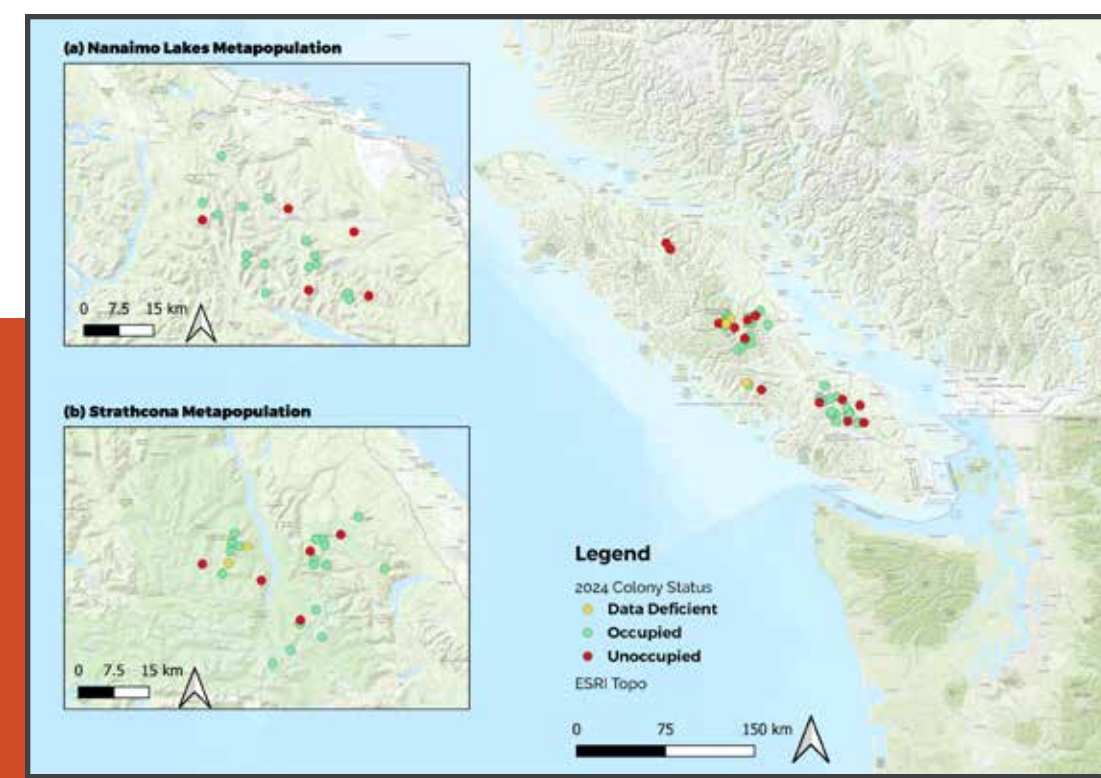
In 2024, the Marmot Recovery Foundation translocated 10 marmots, all to the Strathcona meta-population.



RESTORING CRITICAL HABITAT

Vancouver Island marmots live in steep sub-alpine meadows. These meadows are kept free of trees by snow energy, both in the form of avalanches and snow creep. Whether fast or slow, the movement of snow across the rocky talus scrapes small trees and shrubs off the mountainside, leaving it open for the grasses and flowers marmots eat, and place where they can see danger approaching. Climate change is reducing the amount of snow energy, as more winter precipitation arrives as rain, resulting in more trees and less meadow.

The Marmot Recovery Foundation is restoring marmot habitat to more historic conditions by removing small trees from the meadows and restoring sightlines. In 2024, the Foundation restored over 6 hectares of critical marmot habitat.





MARMOT

RECOVERY FOUNDATION