



GROUNDHOG DAY

With Groundhog Day just around the corner, we thought you might enjoy learning a little bit more about the animal and the holiday.

Groundhogs

Groundhogs are rodents, and belong to the same family as squirrels. The groundhog is known by several other names: woodchuck, land beaver, marmot or whistle-pig. The name whistle-pig comes from the loud, shrill whistle groundhogs sound when frightened. Additionally, they are fierce fighters when necessary. There are reports of groundhogs fighting off dogs as big as collies.

Groundhogs are usually varying shades of brown, but can be completely black or completely white (albino). They typically weigh between 6.6 and 11 pounds, and are approximately one and a half to two feet in length. True hibernators, they rely solely on body fat for winter sustenance.

Groundhogs have two burrows, one for summer and one for winter. Generally they are solitary animals, but may share a burrow. The summer burrow is usually located in the middle of a meadow or pasture, near grass and other plants used for food. The winter den is typically located in a wooded or brushy area near the summer den. The burrows have one main entrance, as well as other tunnels used as lookouts for enemies, although predators are rare—the most common are humans and red foxes. Each burrow has at least two chambers, one for nesting and one for a toilet. In their winter burrows, groundhogs go into deep hibernation. Their metabolic rates and heart rates drop (as low as 5-15 beats per minute), as well as their internal temperature (as low as 38-40 degrees Fahrenheit).

Groundhog Day

- 🌻 Why February 2nd? February 2nd is a “cross-quarter” day, meaning it falls halfway between the winter solstice and the spring equinox.
- 🌻 The first official Groundhog Day was celebrated on February 2nd, 1886 in Punxsutawney, PA.
- 🌻 Punxsutawney, is located about 70 miles northeast of Pittsburgh.
- 🌻 Punxsutawney Phil’s full name is "Punxsutawney Phil, Seer of Seers, Sage of Sages, Prognosticator of Prognosticators and Weather Prophet Extraordinary." It was so proclaimed by the "Punxsutawney Groundhog Club" in 1887, the same year they declared Punxsutawney to be the weather capital of the world.

- ❖ The celebration of Groundhog Day began with Pennsylvania's earliest settlers. They brought with them the legend of Candlemas Day, which states, "For as the sun shines on Candlemas Day, so far will the snow swirl in May..." Thus, if Phil sees his shadow, he predicts six more weeks of winter. If he does not see his shadow, he predicts an early spring.
- ❖ Groundhog Day became much more popular after the movie of the same name, starring Bill Murray and Andie MacDowell, was released in 1993. In the movie Bill Murray, who plays an egoistic weatherman forced to cover Groundhog Day, relives the same day (Groundhog Day, of course!) over and over again. The director of the movie, Harold Ramis, has stated that Bill Murray's character probably lives the same day for the equivalent of about 10 years (or about 3,650 times!) The film was not actually filmed in Punxsutawney, but in Woodstock, Illinois. However, Bill Murray and Harold Ramis have both served as honorary grand marshals of the Groundhog Day celebrations in Punxsutawney.
- ❖ Believe it or not, Punxsutawney Phil is not the only weather-predicting groundhog! Atlanta has General Beauregard Lee, New York has Staten Island Chuck, and Ontario has Wiarton Willie. However, Phil is the oldest, the original, and by far the most popular of the weather-predicting groundhogs!

