



Marmots

Marmot is the generic term to cover the woodchucks ("How much wood could a woodchuck chuck if a woodchuck could chuck wood?") and groundhogs of eastern and central Canada and the marmots of the western mountains. The rarest Canadian marmot is the Vancouver Island marmot, of whom fewer than a hundred survive. His cousins, the hoary marmot and the yellow bellied marmot, are more numerous, and woodchucks and groundhogs abound. All are chunky, short legged animals weighing between four and twenty pounds. In autumn, just before going underground to hibernate, woodchucks and groundhogs stuff themselves very fat indeed, but by the time they come up for spring they have a most lean and hungry look. Some groundhogs become confused in midwinter spells of mild weather,

and surface to see what is going on. Any schoolboy in Canada knows that the groundhog comes out on February 2nd, Groundhog Day, to see how much longer winter will last. If he can see his shadow, goes the tradition, winter will hang on another six weeks, and the groundhog hastily goes back to sleep.

"Let's face it, Canadians seem to have gone conservation crazy. A hundred years ago you could shoot anything that moved, from a moose to a marmot. Nowadays you practically have to get permission just to catch a mouse!"

—Deborah Mason, Toronto journalist and broadcaster.

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