



For Immediate Release
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I AM CANADIAN!

Toronto, Ontario, July 8, 2004: North America's most endangered mammal is small, furry, cute ... and Canadian. Found only on Vancouver Island, less than 30 individuals remain in the wild. The good news is that due to innovative techniques, the Toronto Zoo has been able to captive breed this species with 11 marmot pups born in 2004, or approximately 10% of the world's population, and that most of these pups could be up for wild release as early as 2005.

Vancouver Island marmots, members of the squirrel family, have rich chocolate brown fur with contrasting white patches. 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. Once marmots have been released back into their native habitat, they will be monitored carefully by telemetry to ensure their well being.

In conjunction with the Vancouver Island Marmot Recovery Team, the Toronto Zoo, which accepted 6 marmots in 1998, was the first zoo to establish a captive-breeding program for these animals with the goal of releasing them back into their wild habitat. Since marmots don't become sexually mature until the age of 4 years, and in the wild reproduce only every other year, marmot reproduction presents some problems. But by using a technique called fecal hormonal analysis to gain an understanding of the females' reproductive cycle and by implementing several other innovative methods, Toronto Zoo staff scored breeding success. "Breeding decisions made here have influenced other programs," comments Colette Howe of the Toronto Zoo's Vancouver Island Marmot Recovery Project.

In the works for the fall of 2004, is a new Education Outreach Program, which will spread the word about this species' plight. The Program's stress on endangered species is an excellent fit with current Grade 6 curriculum.

Zoo Hours until Sept. 6th: 9:00am to 7:30pm. Last admissions one hour before closing. General admission 13-64 is \$18, Children 3 and under free, Children 4-12 are \$10 and Seniors 65+ are \$12. Parking is \$8. Events subject to change without notice. The Zoo is located at Meadowvale Road and Hwy.401, Exit 389 east and west bound. For general information, call (416) 392-5929 or visit www.torontozoo.com