

SCIENCE in the Park

GROUNDHOG

Marmota monax

Family: **Sciuridae**

Herbivorous / Insectivorous / Prey

Native to Virginia



The groundhog is a type of rodent known as a marmot and is actually a large ground squirrel. They are one of the few animals within the Park that truly hibernates and their body temperature can drop as low as 5°C. These solitary animals only get together for reproductive purposes. A male's territory will contain several female burrows, and he will rouse from hibernation early to check that the ladies are still in their burrows. The tradition of Groundhog Day is tied to this early appearance of the male groundhog.

Fun Facts

- Groundhogs go by many names: land-beavers, whistle pigs, wood-chucks..
- Groundhogs build impressive and extensive burrows with multiple entrances and levels for hibernation and summer living. The burrows even have special 'bathroom' areas.
- The groundhog can be incredibly destructive in gardens and on farms, and a tractor that hits a burrow can break and axle. Burrows can also undermine the foundations of buildings.
- They can stand on their hind legs to look for danger and can climb trees to escape a predator.
- They have a day and a movie named after them!