







The BIG Six in '06 Marmothon

I am trying to see all six North American marmot species in one calendar year. Hopefully, I can also raise awareness about the Vancouver Island marmot, Canada's most endangered mammal. I am asking people to participate in the Marmothon by pledging a few dollars for each species that I see this year. Each donation will be forwarded in its entirety to the Marmot Recovery Foundation. (I will be paying for all Marmoting costs myself).

My goal is to raise \$5000 dollars for the Vancouver Island Marmot Recovery Foundation

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Meet the Big Six

The "Big Six" are the six species of marmot that occur in North America:



June 27, 2006
Dalton Highway,
Alaska



Alaska Marmot
(*Marmota broweri*)

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June 22, 2006
Denali National Park,
Alaska



Hoary Marmot
(*Marmota caligata*)

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July 18, 2006
Mount Washington,
Vancouver Island,
British Columbia



Vancouver Island Marmot
(*Marmota vancouverensis*)

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June 2, 2006
Olympic National
Park, Washington



Olympic Marmot
(*Marmota olympus*)

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April 24, 2006
Vantage,
Washington



Yellow-bellied Marmot
(*Marmota flaviventris*)

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April 7, 2006
Springboro,
Ohio



Woodchuck
(*Marmota monax*)

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Alaska Marmot



I met up with Aren Gunderson in Fairbanks on June 26th, and we drove 10 hours north on the Dalton highway to a place he calls "Slope Mountain". On a foggy morning of June 27th, we made our way from the road to the mountain, but were dismayed to find that the river that he easily crossed last time was a raging torrent this time. We hiked upriver for a mile, but could find no safe place to cross. So we hiked back, and then hiked downriver for a mile, and eventually found a place where we wouldn't get too wet crossing. While hopping through some willows to cross a river braid, I managed to land on a stick and tear a scab off my leg. I mopped up the blood with some toilet paper, used a bit of moleskin to apply pressure, and was ready to continue. Once on the far bank, we had to hike back upriver for a mile to where we could start climbing. We were rewarded with a few distinctive *broweri* whistles soon after starting our ascent. About halfway up, we spotted a pair of Alaska Marmots on a rocky outcrop. The pair had vanished by the time we got near, and seemingly never returned. We continued our scramble to the summit, where a large meadow opened up. By noon, the sky had cleared, and I managed to photograph a baby, and two adults.

This marmot species was previously thought to occur only in the Brooks Range of northern Alaska (e.g., in The Gates of the Arctic National Park). However, Aren Gunderson has recently documented *broweri* well north and well south of their previously-believed range limits. He is

traveling around northern Alaska, looking for Alaska marmots so he can map the geographic extent of the species, and to determine if a distinct geographic boundary separates *broweri* from neighboring marmot species. He is also using DNA tests to work out the population structure among isolated *broweri* groupings.





There is still very little known about this marmot. According to DNA tests, the Alaska marmot is more closely related to Asian marmots than to its closest North American neighbor, the Hoary marmot.

Hoary Marmot



The Hoary Marmot was seen on 22 June. I rented a car in Fairbanks and drove to Denali, and proceeded straight out to Savage River, where I heard marmotting was best. I got out of the car, looked around, spotted an alpine meadow in a "bowl" above the tree-line and started hiking towards it. En-route it rained a bit, and then it rained a lot. And then it started hailing. As the hail-size increased to about 5 mm, I took shelter in the overhang of a large boulder. When the hail let up, I looked around for marmots to no avail. I took shelter again to avoid the next hail storm, after which I spotted an Arctic Ground Squirrel. While trying to get into a good position to photograph it without disturbing it, I noticed a marmot on the next rocky outcropping. He was a shy fellow, but allowed me to take a few photos.



On my last day in Alaska, I hiked up to the Wickersham Dome where I found a pair of adults and two yearling Hoary marmots to add to the photo collection.





The Hoary marmot lives in alpine areas of the Cascade Range, in the northern Rocky Mountains, and in Alaska.

Vancouver Island Marmot



A single individual was seen on Mount Washington between 7:30 and 9 AM on July 18, 2006. I hiked up the mountain at 6 AM, and proceeded directly to the area where I had found marmots 2 years ago. I thought I had read that the marmots that I saw two years ago were still alive, but I had also heard a rumor that they did not survive the winter one year. With that uncertainty in mind, I picked a comfortable looking rock, set up my scope and sat down for some marmot viewing. By 7 AM, what I had thought of as peak- marmot-activity time had already come and gone, and there was no sign of any marmots. I started to believe the rumors. I packed up and walked off thinking that I could try to find some marmots elsewhere - maybe my target marmots got up early and were off feeding somewhere nearby. After walking around the mountain for a while, I realized that there was no other close, obvious habitat that wasn't part of the mountain bike trail, so I returned to my original spot. Within 2 minutes, one marmot emerged from the burrow and fed in the vicinity for 1.5 hours.

At the end, the marmot gathered up a huge mouthful of grass and hay, and returned to the burrow with it. I waited for over an hour, but the marmot did not seem to be in any hurry to re-emerge from the burrow. At 10 AM, I packed up and left the site.



On the afternoon of July 18th, and again on the morning of the 19th, a second marmot was seen in the same location. The second one was smaller, probably a yearling, and had a big patch of fur missing from its backside and its tail.



Vancouver Island marmots were a trick to find because of their limited range and limited numbers. This species is found only on Vancouver Island in British Columbia, Canada. It is also one of Canada's most endangered animals, with fewer than 40 individuals existing in the wild. There is evidence for some population-level differences between the Mount Washington individuals, and those found in the mountains near Nanaimo.

Update: August 19.

I just attended the Donors Go Wild event, which saw my return to these marmots on Mount Washington. We saw one adult and four yearling babies! See photos of baby marmots and details of the event on the blog-style updates page (pages 21-24).

Olympic Marmot

These marmots were seen on June 2, despite the day being cold, windy, cloudy, foggy and rainy. I had been told of the presence of some marmots in the Hurricane Bowl. Unfortunately, the road to the trailhead that leads to Hurricane Bowl was still closed for the winter. In fact, the road was buried under 15 foot snow drifts, which dwarfed a pair of heavy-duty snow plows that were sitting outside the Visitor's Center. Nevertheless, the snow pack was hard, and I was able to trek through the snow up to the trailhead, and start my walk up to the bowl. After an hour, I had arrived. I walked down to a patch of trees, where I hid myself, set up my spotting scope, and waited. When the rain got heavy, I retired to the shelter of a big evergreen, and protected myself from the wind. After about an hour and a half, the weather had not let up, the marmots were not above ground, and I gave up and headed back to the Visitor's Center. About a quarter of the way down the trail, I saw blue sky! I quickly turned around, and ran back to my patch of trees, but by the time I had arrived, it was grey, foggy and misty again. Figuring that the blue sky could return at any time, I selected a new place to sit down, and waited again. At around 1 PM, I looked over, and saw a marmot running across a patch of snow! The marmot found a big rock to climb on top of, and proceeded to sit there for at least half an hour, despite the wind, mist and the fog. I managed to click-off a few photos to document the occasion. Within the hour, there was another marmot out there feeding along with the first one.



On June 3, I returned to Hurricane Hill and the sunny weather allowed me to take the following photos:



I also caught a pair of marmots in the midst of a tussle. I think the grayer one looks like he knows kung fu.



Thanks to Suzanne Cox Griffin, marmot researcher at the University of Montana, for the help in finding the marmots.



These marmots are restricted to the Olympic Mountains of western Washington State, where they are apparently declining in numbers. Elevated mortality rates of females appears to be associated with this decline.

Update: July 31.

I returned to the Olympic Mountains, looking for Mountain beaver near Royal Lake. It was foggy or rained the whole time I was there. I did not find any Mountain beavers, but I did come across a good number of Olympic marmots in the Upper Basin Area. See photos of baby marmots and details of my trip on the blog-stlye updates page (pages 24-28)!

Yellow-bellied Marmot

This marmot has been seen almost every day from April 24 until the start of June. A colony lives under some pipes on the side of the road leading from Ellensburg (where I was living for the month of April and May) to Wanapum Dam (where I was working as a fish biologist until June). On the way to work on my first day, I spotted the colony as we drove by them. After work that day, I returned, but the marmots were not active. I have passed by their pipes twice a day since then, and have stopped to check them out each time. My highest count for the colony has been 14 individuals, most of which were babies. One day in late April, I stopped on the side of the road, stayed in my rental car, and tried to photograph them. I was not able to get any good shots, but I did witness two babies climb up a tree to eat the leaves that were not accessible from ground level. I filmed one baby Yellow-belly climbing back down the tree head first -- just like their cousins the tree squirrels.

I have also seen Yellow-bellied marmots on Huntzinger Road near the Wanapum Dam, and also on the lawn of a rehab facility that you pass on the way from Ellensburg to Yakima.

In early May, I stopped by the pipes and photographed them from inside my car for four hours, and actually managed to get a few good shots, including the ones below:







This marmot is common in lower elevations areas surrounding the Cascade Range and the Rocky Mountains.

Woodchuck

While visiting our family, my wife and I saw a pair of woodchucks foraging on a hill by the side of a busy Ohio road at around 5 PM on 7 April 2006. They were feeding on dandelions in the grass near a wall by a pharmacy parking lot. Despite an apparent lack of fear of the cars racing by, the marmots scurried to their den as soon as we got out of the car. We did not want to disturb their foraging, so we departed. We returned at about the same time on next day, but the marmots were not active. On the third day, we returned again, and found a marmot sitting near its burrow. We were able to remain inconspicuous, and were treated to views of the marmot venturing out into the open to feed. We returned on the fourth day (earlier in the day), and found that there were at least four woodchucks in this colony. Simultaneously, we saw one sitting near the burrow on the hill, two in the woods across from the hill, and at least one in the field across a lane from the hill. The marmots were fairly active, but stayed mostly in the dense brush and wooded areas. On one occasion, a marmot ventured out into the open, and I was able to take a few photos and film some foraging and preening behaviour.





This marmot is quite common in the eastern parts of the continent. Its range extends into the boreal forest of northern Canada, and into Alaska. Woodchucks are frequently seen by the side of the road in wooded urban areas. In parts of the United States and Canada, this marmot is also known as a groundhog. Some people believe that woodchucks behaviour can be used as a predictor of weather patterns.

Marmothon Updates

February 20, 2007.

The Marmothon is front page news on the Recovery Foundation newsletter, "The Marmoteer". Donors should receive a copy of the newsletter in their mailbox.

August 19.

I just attended the Donors Go Wild event - well, the first two days of it anyway. It was a blast. On the first night, we met at Mount Washington, ate dinner, and then adjourned to the "Marmot Room," where Dr. Andrew Bryant gave us a power-point presentation about the latest VI marmot scientific findings. I am not sure how much of it is published yet, so I shouldn't reveal too much of what he said. The next day we woke early, and headed up the mountain to see some marmots. Wouldn't you know it, they headed exactly to the place where I had seen my VI marmots in July. We saw one adult and four yearling pups! This means that Shelby (the mom) had pups three years in a row - a new wild VI marmot record. She has had mostly female children, so there is now a shortage of male suitors on the mountain. The event had an added bonus feature - we got to help with / watch the release of two captive-bred 2-year-old brothers into the area. What a treat. One marmot entered a burrow as soon as he was released; the other took off like a bolt of lightning. His radio tag revealed that he didn't go far though.

Afterwards, we took a tour of the mountain, with telemetry equipment revealing where all the marmots were hiding. I had to leave this afternoon, but the others stayed another night and will go to visit the captive breeding facility tomorrow. Here are some baby marmot photos that I took:









August 11.

The Marmot Recovery Foundation has agreed to my request to attend the Donors Go Wild event as a sort of side-show act. I will pay my own transport, room and food. In exchange for being able to attend the events, I will make myself available to answer any questions that the paid-attendees might have about the Marmothon. *Happy birthday, mom!*

July 31.

I made another trip to the Olympic Mountains this weekend. I went looking for Mountain beaver near Royal Lake. It was foggy or rained the whole time I was there. Although I did not find any Mountain beavers, I did come across a good number of Olympic marmots (many without ear-tags) in the Upper Basin Area. I spent a few hours watching a family of five (two adults and 3 babies) that were occupying a hillside adjacent to the path. On several occasions, the marmots crossed the path to feed in the nearby floodplain. Here are some of my photos:









July 26.

Because of the money raised by the Marmothon, I was just invited to attend the Marmot Recovery Foundation's "Donors Go Wild" event in mid-August. Apparently all of the top donors were invited to participate - for an additional \$2,000 donation. We were invited to come up to Mount Washington, where we will see a talk from a marmot biologist, get a guided tour of the captive breeding facility, and have a guided hike out to a sub-alpine meadow to see live wild marmots. We will get to meet several of the field staff, a few of the other donors, and, of course, Robert Huber, the executive director (who had been my contact at the recovery foundation throughout the Marmothon). The \$2000 pays

for the events, room and food - and the whopping majority of it goes straight into the MRF fundraising coffers. This is a fantastic fundraising idea. Especially since the majority of donors, I am sure, have never seen a wild Vancouver Island marmot. Of course, I don't have \$2000, but it sounded like fun.

July 25.

The financial goal has been met. Thanks to the fact that pledges continued to roll in, even after I had already seen the sixth marmot species, we have managed to raise over \$5000. These funds will support the re-introduction of between 5 and 7 captive-bred marmots into formerly-occupied habitat in the mountains near Nanaimo. The marmot recovery Foundation plans to release up to 35 captive-bred marmots into the wild this summer.

July 18.

IT IS DONE! A single Vancouver Island marmot - the last North American species that I needed to complete the Marmothon - was seen on Mount Washington between 7:30 and 9 AM. **I have now seen "All Six in '06".**

I hiked up the mountain at 6 AM, and proceeded directly to the area where I had found marmots 2 years ago (See below to read how I found them in 2004). I thought I had read that the marmots that I saw two years ago were still alive, but I had also heard a rumor that they did not survive the winter one year. With that uncertainty in mind, I picked a comfortable looking rock, set up my scope and sat down for some marmot viewing. By 7 AM, what I had thought of as peak- marmot-activity time had already come and gone, and there was no sign of any marmots. I started to believe the rumors. I packed up and walked off thinking that I could try to find some marmots elsewhere - maybe my target marmots got up early and were off feeding somewhere nearby. After walking around the mountain for a while, I realized that there was no other close, obvious habitat that wasn't part of the mountain bike trail, so I returned to my original spot. Within 2 minutes, one marmot emerged from the burrow and fed in the vicinity for 1.5 hours. At the end, the marmot gathered up a huge mouthful of grass and hay, and returned to the burrow with it. I waited for over an hour, but the marmot did not seem to be in any hurry to re-emerge from the burrow. At 10 AM, I packed up and left the site.

How I found the marmots on Mount Washington in 2004

In 2004, I decided that I would like to see our local marmot, and contacted a scientist at the Recovery Foundation. I emailed him to ask if he thought it would be okay to come up and try to find them, or if it would be better just to leave them alone. He replied that in certain cases, the presence of humans actually can deter the marmot's predators (golden eagles, cougars, etc) and as long as the marmots weren't being disturbed, good can actually come from marmot viewing. He proceeded to give me a set of very simple directions for finding marmots on Mount Washington: "Take the blue chair lift to the top. Climb to the summit. Turn west, walk 500 m and you will either see a marmot or a marmot biologist". Simple!

I enlisted my next-door neighbors to drive me up to the mountain, and we followed the directions. We took the blue chair lift to the top, climbed to the summit, turned west, and walked only 50 m, and found a sheer cliff! We could proceed no farther, and there were no marmots or marmot biologists to be seen in the distance. I must have recorded the directions incorrectly. So, in the absence of any other information, and without anyone else to turn to, I asked the chair lift operators if they knew where the marmots could be found. Some did not know what a marmot was, but others said that marmots were typically seen at blue chair-lift Tower #12. So, I walked back down the mountain to the 12th tower and looked around. This was very bad marmot habitat. It was too brushy with nowhere for them to sit and watch for predators. I waited there for a few hours anyway. My neighbors took off to explore other parts of the mountain. After a few hours, I decided that marmots were most commonly seen near the blue chair lift because of the density of observers in the area, not because of the density of marmots there. I got up, and wandered around looking for habitat, but failed to find any marmots. At the end of the day, I met my neighbors at the gift shop. They said they came across a person carrying a radio antenna, and figured she must be tracking marmots. They asked her where to look, and were told to go to the 12th tower of the orange chair lift. Regardless, it was the end of the day and my neighbors wanted to leave, so we did.

The next weekend, I rented a car and went up to look around the orange chair lift. Each day I climbed up the mountain, and looked around. It was raining heavily both days, and no marmots were seen. However, I did find a few marmot-looking burrow holes that were located in a meadow that looked like it could be good habitat. It was also within about 100 m of the Orange Tower 12 - this was most likely the spot.

The third weekend, I returned to the mountain with my wife Melissa. We drove up from Victoria, and arrived at Mount Washington in the evening. We proceeded directly to my burrow spot, and found not only an adult marmot foraging around in the grass, but also a marmot biologist standing there. She said that she believed that there might also be a pup in the burrow.

The next morning, Melissa and I climbed back up to the burrow area and saw two adults, and two pups foraging in the grass near their father. Melissa took a few photographs of the pups by holding her camera up to my spotting scope. Even though we were hiding in the trees, and the marmots were showing no signs of distress, we left the area after only about an hour in order to avoid disturbing them.

That night, I contacted the biologist at the Recovery Foundation and sent him some of the better photos that Melissa took. He was quite excited because this was the first evidence that there were two (not one) pups born that year. He asked if he could circulate the photos to the board of directors, etc. We agreed, of course. The next day, one of Melissa's photos was on the front page of the Times Columnist (credited to me). Some other photos she took can be seen on the Marmot Recovery Foundation webpage. I asked if they could name the two pups after my guinea pigs (Capy and Yogi), but never got a reply.

Here are some of the photos she took:





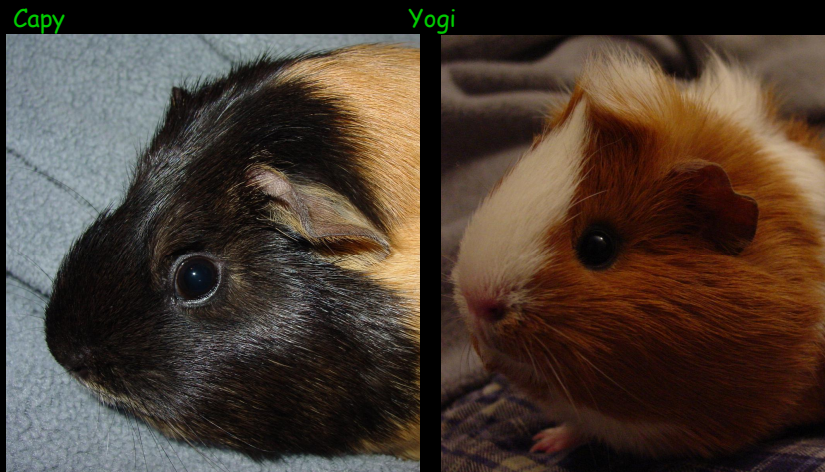
July 17.

I am off today to Mount Washington to look for the Vancouver Island Marmot, my last marmot for 2006. The weather is supposed to be good. I will keep my eyes open and my fingers crossed.

July 11.

I have been asked by Robert Huber, Executive Director of the Marmot Recovery Foundation, to name one of the marmots that will be released this summer. I chose the name "Yogi." Here is why:

Two years ago, I sort of "discovered" a pair of marmot pups born on Mount Washington, and asked the Marmot Recovery Foundation that they be named after my guinea pigs, Capy and Yogi. Capy is named after the largest rodent in the world, the capybara, a close relative of the guinea pig. Anyway, I never heard back from the Foundation, and I never thought that my guinea pig names would find themselves attached to marmots.



In June, while helping Suzanne Cox Griffin put ear tags on Olympic marmots, she explained to me how each year's cohorts have been named thematically. One year, they were all named after philosophers (Kant, Aristotle, etc). Another year, they were named Fire, Thunder, Ice, Lightning, etc. One year, the marmots were all named after rodents (Vole, Squirrel, and Capybara). I was delighted to hear that there was a marmot already named Capy. Now that I have been given the chance to name a Vancouver Island Marmot, both my guinea pigs have been immortalized in marmot-dom.

July 1.

I used my last two days in Fairbanks to look around. Today I climbed up to the summit of the Wickersham Dome (about 28 miles north of Fairbanks on the Elliott Highway), and found a pair of adults and a pair of yearling Hoary marmots. These provided a bit of enjoyment and ended my trip to Alaska on a high note.

June 29 at 7 PM.

On the long drive homewards on the infamous Dalton Highway, we stopped to pull someone's truck out of a ditch. He gave us \$40 for our efforts, claiming a tow-truck would cost 10 times that. We declined, but he insisted. Later, we decided to put the money towards the Marmothon. Look for "Guy that we pulled out of a ditch along the Dalton Highway" in the donors list!

June 29 at 3 PM.

We checked one site south of the Brooks Range, and found no marmots. In the afternoon, the rain started again, and the forecast was bad, so we packed it in and headed back to Fairbanks. It's lucky we saw the marmots that first day, as it was our only patch of sun the whole week.

June 28.

No further Alaska marmots were found in areas north of Slope Mountain, or in the Toolik Lake area. It started raining, so we can't be too sure of some of the later places we checked. In the evening, we drove back south through the Brooks Range to look for Alaska marmots in areas of suitable habitat south of their known range.

June 27 at midnight.

Here is a photo of Slope mountain (facing west from the road) taken at midnight. Since we were at 68 degrees north, the sun never set. When I took this photo, the sun was low in the sky, and was hidden directly behind the mountain.



Here is the view from the top of Slope mountain (facing eastwards), taken at around 8 PM. If anything, marmots pick some of the most scenic places to live (except Woodchucks (pharmacies (see April 7 below))).



June 27 at 9 PM.

The FIFTH marmot species has now been seen! On June 26th, I met up with Aren Gunderson in Fairbanks, and we drove 10 hours north on the Dalton highway to a place he calls "Slope Mountain". On a foggy morning of June 27th, we made our way from the road to the mountain, but were dismayed to find that the river that he easily crossed last time was a

raging torrent this time. To cross safely, we ended up hiking about 4 miles through soggy tundra. Once we crossed the river and started up the mountain, we were quickly rewarded with a few distinctive *broweri* whistles. About halfway up, we spotted a pair of Alaska Marmots on a rocky outcrop. The pair had vanished by the time we got near, and seemingly never returned. We continued our scramble to the summit, where a large meadow opened up, and where I saw about 4 adults and one yearling.

June 25.

There were no further marmots seen in Denali. I got off the shuttle bus at Polychrome, and looked around, especially at "Marmot Rock". I saw one thing that might have been a marmot burrow, but no animals. I heard that passengers on a subsequent bus saw marmots at polychrome later that day.

June 22 at 11 PM.

Here is a photo of the hail stones:



June 22 at 10 PM.

Number Four! The Hoary Marmot was seen today. This morning, I rented a car in Fairbanks and drove to Denali, and proceeded straight out to Savage River, where I heard marmotting was best. I got out of the car, looked around, spotted an alpine meadow in a "bowl" above the tree-line and started hiking towards it. En-route it rained a bit, and then it rained a lot. And then it started hailing. As the hail-size increased to about 5 mm, I took shelter in the overhang of a large boulder. When the hail let up, I looked around for marmots to no avail. I took shelter again to avoid the next hail storm, after which I spotted an Arctic Ground Squirrel. While trying to get into a good position to photograph it without disturbing it, I noticed a marmot on the next rocky outcropping. He was a shy fellow, and didn't do anything particularly cute for the camera. regardless, I will post pictures when I get back home. I will spend a few more days looking around down here, and maybe get some better photos. On Monday, I begin the quest for the Alaska Marmot.

June 21.

I leave today for the Last Frontier State. I cannot wait to see those giant mountains and the little squirrels. First, I will spend a few days around Denali National Park, looking for Hoary Marmots. I have heard that they can be found around Savage River. I have also heard that the Savage River area is closed because of a bear incident. So, it might not be safe to look around there, which could cause problems for the marmotting agenda. I may have to look in the White Mountains north of Fairbanks.

Starting Monday the 25th, I will be heading up to the Brooks Range with a marmot researcher from the Museum of the North (UAF) to do a week's worth of Alaska marmot observation. This is the most remote and least well known marmot species in North America, so there is a lot we can learn about them.

June 20.

As of today, we have reached the 90% mark in terms of the financial goal. Pledges are now totaling almost \$4500.

My "press release" that I sent to CBC has gone unanswered, and I never did figure out how to contact the Times Columnist or the "Island News". I will have to wait until I get back from Alaska to pursue those leads. I don't want them trying to contact me while I am away, and then giving up on me.

June 17.

Thrifty Foods has declined to sponsor the Marmothon, as has Raincoast Adventure Sports and Ocean River. I have not heard anything from the other potential sponsors.

June 11.

I went shopping downtown to pick up supplies for the trip to Alaska. I got a few of those "add boiling water" meals, and some tent sealer. I also tried to buy mittens, and couldn't find any. Would you believe that it's hard to find a good pair of woolen mittens in June? I guess I'll start knitting.

June 9.

With my new, expanded web-hosting service, I have been able to re-vamp the Marmothon webpage. Now, I have included small video clips of the three marmot species that I have seen so far. They can be found either by clicking on one of the six marmot photos at the top of the introductory webpage, or by following the links on the "Meet the Big Six" webpage.

June 7.

I spent a few hours today preparing letters for corporate sponsorship. REI only sponsors causes suggested by their employees. Patagonia only deals with the big-deal charities. MEC wants the activity to occur entirely within Canada. I ended up writing a letter to Thrifty Foods (a local grocery store that has a policy of community activity), and to Marmot clothing company. The latter already contributes to the Marmot Recovery Foundation, so it's unclear how they will respond. I decided to try MEC regardless of their policy, given that they just opened their first store on Vancouver Island, and the Marmothon would be a good symbolic first gesture.

June 6.

I ran out of room on my webpage! I had to reduce the resolution of the Olympic marmot photos in order for them to fit in under my 5 MB limit. Starting to shop around, I appear to have hit a wall, in that I cannot move my site since it has been registered for less than 2 months. I could expand my space at the current site, but I would really like to include movies on the webpage, and my current host does not allow that.

June 3.

The weather was much better today. I got a pretty bad sunburn, and I assume that my face will fall off in a few weeks - probably right on time for my trip to the Arctic. I had sunscreen with me, but it was cold enough that it didn't really occur to me to use it until it was too late. Today I went back to the Hurricane Bowl, this time with marmot researcher Suzanne Cox Griffin. We located a few marmots using radio telemetry, thus confirming that they were still alive. We also caught and changed the ear-bands on a pair of marmots whose ear-bands had become un-readable over the winter. I was in charge of holding the marmots, while Suzanne did the handy work, and also took a few length and weight measurements, and assessed their state of sexual maturity. I was very happy to help out.

Here is a photo of a fog bank rolling in:



June 2.

This morning it was cold, windy, cloudy, foggy and rainy. Upon arrival at the Hurricane Ridge Visitor's Center, I discovered that Obstruction Point Road (where I saw Olympic Marmots two years ago) was fenced off. I walked down the road a little ways, and discovered a few fallen trees and boulders blocking the mostly snow-free path. I couldn't remember how far we had to drive last time, but since nothing was looking familiar, I figured it was too far to walk, and I turned back. After all, I had a lead on the presence of marmots in the Hurricane Bowl. Unfortunately, the road to the trailhead that leads to Hurricane Bowl was also closed. In fact, the road was buried under 15 foot snow drifts, which dwarfed a pair of heavy-duty snow plows that were sitting outside the Visitor's Center. Nevertheless, the snow pack was hard, and I was able to trek through the snow up to the trailhead, and start my walk up to the bowl. After an hour, I had arrived. I walked down to a patch of trees, where I hid myself, set up my spotting scope, and waited. When the rain got heavy, I retired to the shelter of a big evergreen, and protected myself from the wind and cold by curling up into a ball, pulling my sweater around my leg, and pulling my arms and head inside my sweater. After about an hour and a half, the weather had not let up, the marmots were not above ground, and I gave up and headed back to the Visitor's Center. About a quarter of the way down the trail, I saw blue sky! I quickly turned around, and ran back to my patch of trees, but by the time I had arrived, it was grey, foggy and misty again. Figuring that the blue sky could return at any time, I chose a new place to sit down, and waited again. I'm pretty sure I fell asleep a few times, but at around 1 PM, I looked over, and saw a marmot running across a patch of snow from a small, uncovered burrow to a larger, snow-free patch of meadow. Success! The marmot found a big rock to climb on top of, and proceeded to sit there for at least half an hour, despite the wind, mist and the fog. At times, the fog was so thick that I couldn't even make out the snow-free patch, let alone the marmot within it. Nevertheless, I managed to click-off a few photos to document the occasion. Within the hour, there was another marmot out there feeding along with the first one. By 3 PM, the weather had not yet broken, and the light of day was only getting worse for photos. I had seen my marmots, so I headed back to the Visitor's Center.

Here is a photo of the meadow patch where the marmots were spotted:



June 1 at 8 PM.

I met with Suzanne Cox Griffin and her husband Paul, marmot researchers at University of Montana. Suzanne and I arranged to meet on Saturday (3 June), when I would go out to Hurricane Hill and help her with her marmot studies for the day.

June 1 at 5 PM.

I finished my 5-week work term in central Washington, having seen Yellow-bellied marmots every day for over a month. Today, I began my drive home to Victoria BC, driving through Seattle, across to the Olympic Peninsula, and up to Port Angeles. Of course, I will be trying over the next few days for the Olympic marmot. The weather does not bode well, however, as there are periods of heavy rain, interspersed with periods of fog and light rain - bad for alpine marmoting. This is the first time since contacting Aren Gunderson (Alaska marmot researcher), that it occurred to me that I might not actually see all six marmots in '06. This foul weather is bad, but it would be not problem for me to return to Olympic National Park as often as I need to this summer. But will happen if something goes wrong with the weather in the Brooks Range?!?

May 13.

Apparently, the ranger at the Olympic National Park forwarded my information request to a researcher at the University of Montana who is studying the Olympic marmots. She just contacted me, and volunteered to help me see the Olympic marmots. She says they are somewhat scarce this year, but has not elaborated with any speculation about the cause.

May 12 at 11 PM.

I booked my ticket to Alaska tonight, using Alaska Airline mileage points. I will head northwards from 21 June until 2 July. It will be my first trip up to the Last Frontier State, and I am very excited. First, I will go to Denali National Park to try to find the white-coated Hoary marmots that reside there. Then I will meet Aren Gunderson, a marmot researcher in Fairbanks, and we will drive up to the Gates of the Arctic National Park where we will spend 5 days looking for the elusive Alaska marmots, who are strictly limited to the Brooks Range in the northern part of the state. Along the way I hope to happen across some Arctic Ground Squirrels and Muskox, and other arctic-style wildlife.

May 12 at 8 PM.

I sent an email to the Olympic National Park asking them if the roads were open and if the marmots were awake from their hibernation. They confirmed both, paving the way for a visit at the beginning of June.

May 11.

I received my first pledge from someone who I have never met. The sister in law of someone I used to work with has pledged to the Marmothon.

May 10.

My boss confirmed that I will be able to take time off work to go to Alaska June 26-30. Now I just have to book my ticket.

May 8.

Aren Gunderson has contacted me, committing to two trips to survey a marmot area that is accessible by hiking an hour off the Dalton Hwy: June 26-30 and Aug 8-12.

May 7.

Marmothon.com webpage officially unveiled. I sent pledge request emails to everyone I know, directing them to the webpage.

May 3 to 7.

In discussion with "web" people, I found that it was simply too difficult to include an automatic pledge form on the webpage. For now, I will simply have to ask people to email me with their pledge, and send a cheque.

May 2.

Robert Huber suggested that I set a monetary "goal" for the Marmothon. He provided me with a list of MRF activities, and their associated costs. Assuming that I could raise about \$5,000, I set my goal to the amount required to prepare a site for the reintroduction of marmots - estimated to cost about \$5,100 per site.

April 31.

Today, I stopped by the Yellow-bellied marmot's pipes and photographed them from inside my car for four hours, and I think I actually managed to get some good shots.

April 29 at 9 PM.

Dr. Link Olson has confirmed that I will be able to accompany the marmot graduate student (Aren Gunderson) for a week this summer. My job will be to help carry equipment, help spot some marmots, and lend a hand in general. He put me in contact with Aren directly, so we could work out the details.

April 29 at 5 PM.

I have passed by the Yellow-bellied marmot's pipes twice a day since first spotting them, and I have stopped to check them out each time. My highest count for the colony has been 14 individuals, most of which are babies. Today, I stopped on the side of the road, stayed in my rental car, and tried to photograph them. I was not able to get any good shots, but I did witness two babies climb up a tree to eat the leaves that were not accessible from ground level. I filmed one baby Yellow-belly climbing back down the tree head first -- just like their cousins the tree squirrels.

April 25.

Robert Huber returned my email. He had looked at my webpage, and suggested that the VI Marmot information I had included was somewhat dated. He updated me on the current status of the species. I modified my webpage accordingly, and included within the webpage a number of links that take browsers directly to the MRF webpage.

April 24.

A colony of Yellow-bellied marmots was spotted under some pipes on the side of the road leading from Ellensburg (where I am living for the month of April and May) to Wanapum Dam (where I am working as a fish biologist until June).

April 23.

I made a first-draft of the marmothon.com webpage, and asked Robert Huber to take a look at it.

April 17 at 11 AM.

Robert Huber of the MRF contacted me, saying that he would support the Marmothon, as long as I didn't interfere with the marmots in any way. Since I have no intention of approaching or interfering (just viewing from a distance), there should be no problem. He also mentioned potential for expanding the coverage and exposure that I receive as a result of the Marmothon.

April 17 at 9 AM.

Andrew Bryant at the Vancouver Island Marmot Recovery Foundation returned my email from 4 April (he was out in the field), saying that he liked the Marmothon idea, and forwarded by original email to Robert Huber, the MRF Executive Director.

April 11.

I contacted Dr. Link Olson (University of Alaska at Fairbanks) today. I told him about my Marmothon idea, and asked if he knew where a reliable group of Alaska Marmots could be found. I told him that I had heard that he has a grad student studying Alaska marmots, and asked him to put me in contact with him. I also asked if I could volunteer to help the student for a week this summer.

April 7.

While visiting our family, my wife and I saw a pair of woodchucks foraging on a hill by the side of a busy Ohio road at around 5 PM on 7 April 2006. They were feeding on dandelions in the grass near a wall by a pharmacy parking lot. Despite an apparent lack of fear of the cars racing by, the marmots scurried to their den as soon as we got out of the car. We did not want to disturb their foraging, so we departed. We returned at about the same time on next day, but the marmots were not active. On the third day, we returned again, and found a marmot sitting near its burrow. We were able to remain inconspicuous, and were treated to views of the marmot venturing out into the open to feed. We returned on the fourth day (earlier in the day), and found that there were at least four woodchucks in this colony. Simultaneously, we saw one sitting near the burrow on the hill, two in the woods across from the hill, and at least one in the field across a lane from the hill. The marmots were fairly active, but stayed mostly in the dense brush and wooded areas. On one occasion, a marmot ventured out into the open, and I was able to take a few photos and film some foraging and preening behaviour.

April 5.

I heard back again from Dr. Davis. He suggested that I contact Dr. Link Olson at University of Alaska at Fairbanks. Apparently, he was visiting Berkeley and mentioned that one of his graduate students is doing his PhD on Alaska Marmots. Dr. Davis also suggested that I create website listing the marmots that I've seen. This website is the result of that great idea.

April 4 at 4 PM.

I contacted Dr. Andrew Bryant of the Vancouver Island Marmot Recovery Foundation, and told him about my Marmothon idea.

April 4 at 2:30 PM.

Dr. Davis already returned my email. He said he would check the museum records to see where specimens were collected, and said that he would mention it to some other folks who might be able to help.

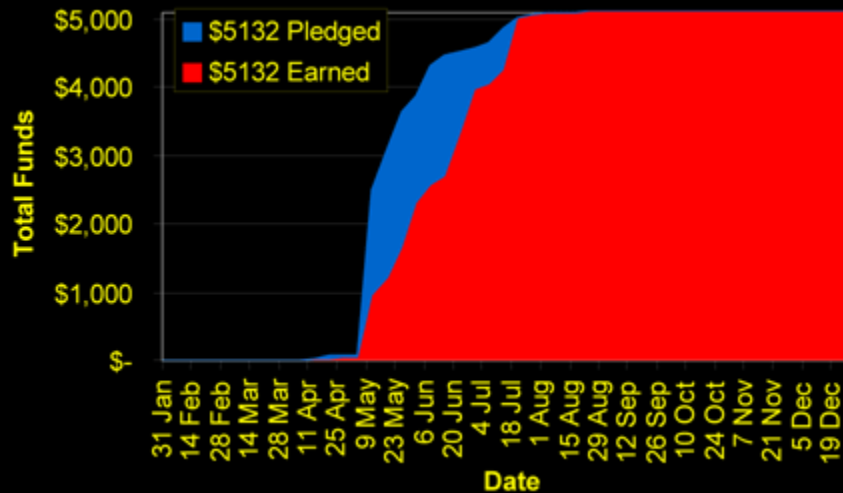
April 4 at 2 PM.

I contacted a researcher at UC Berkeley (Dr. Edward Davis) who published a paper on marmot phylogeny. At some point he would have had to have a tissue sample from an Alaska Marmot, so I thought he might know (or know someone who might know) where a reliable group of Alaska Marmots could be found.

Fundraising Progress

Thanks to everyone's generous pledges, I have passed my financial goal of \$5000. These funds will support the re-introduction of between 5 and 7 captive-bred marmots into formerly-occupied habitat in the mountains near Nanaimo.

These graphs show how we did:



Marmothon Sponsors

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...and the guy that we pulled out of a ditch along
the Dalton Highway