

Friends of NCTC Program Activity

Groundhog Day

*Much of this program is taken from a lesson plan created by Potomac Valley Audubon Society
(PO Box 578, Shepherdstown WV 25443.) We thank them for the ideas!*

(ages 5 and above)

Background

Can Groundhogs really predict the weather? We don't really know, but people have been paying attention to them for a long, long time! You will learn more about groundhogs through these program activities and decide for yourself if they are weather "prognosticators!" (That means predictors)

What You Will Need for This Project

Groundhog Bingo Cards

Bingo Markers (beans, pennies, etc)

Bandana or sheet of paper for everyone playing the Groundhog Game

What to Do

Groundhog Day is celebrated on February 2nd. The most famous US groundhog is Punxsutawney Phil who lives in Pennsylvania. In West Virginia, French Creek Freddie is the most celebrated groundhog. Find out if there is a famous groundhog in the state where you live! The idea is that if the groundhog sees his shadow on that day (because the weather is clear), there will be six more weeks of winter; if he doesn't see his shadow (because of clouds), there will be an early spring.

Can Groundhogs Really Predict The Weather? The weather lore was brought from German-speaking areas where the badger is the forecasting animal. In areas where there were many Pennsylvania Dutch (Germans) immigrants, a groundhog replaced the badger. February 2nd was first noted in the United States in 1840 (183 years ago!) In Punxsutawney PA, the first celebration was in 1886.

Studies have found no consistent association between a groundhog seeing its shadow and the arrival of spring-like weather, but...what do you think? Try an experiment by writing down what the groundhog predicts on February 2nd and then chart the temperature every week until March 20 or 21 (the official first day of Spring.) Does your scientific recording match what the groundhog predicted?

What Do You Know About Groundhogs? Play a Groundhog BINGO game! Use the cards in this program to play a game with a friend. An adult can read a clue and you can mark your card. Who will win Groundhog Bingo first?!

Play A Groundhog Game You will need friends for this—the more the merrier—and an adult to help. Groundhogs eat by sitting up tall with their front paws tucked on their chests. They watch for danger while they eat and will make a loud whistle sound to warn other groundhogs to hide, scatter, or run!

To play, it is helpful if you have a carpet square or bandana (or piece of paper) for each person to have as "base." Each "groundhog" walks around the bases with their "paws" tucked in their chest. As you walk, sniff the air and look around for danger. The adult who is helping you will hold up a picture of an animal. If it is one that likes to eat groundhogs (predators), groundhogs make a loud "weeeeeee" sound and find a "base" and hide by kneeling down and putting your arms over your head. Once all groundhogs are safe, the coast is clear and you can walk around the bases again. If the picture is not a predator, the groundhogs keep walking. Another animal picture is held up and groundhogs react appropriately. Be careful—the adult holding the pictures might even chase the groundhogs!

Helpful Hints for Adults
(books to read, other websites, links)

How Groundhog's Garden Grew by Lynne Cherry

Groundhog Day! By Gail Gibbons

Groundhog Secrets: Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Woodchucks (Stories of Groundhogs, Squirrels, and Chipmunks) by Lieve Snellings

It is possible to watch Punxsutawney Phil make his predictions online although the event is often uploaded to You Tube later that day. The actual prediction usually comes shortly after 7 a.m. so check this site for more information in advance of February 2nd.

<https://www.visitpa.com/article/celebrating-groundhog-day-2023>

To learn more about French Creek Freddie (and visit him!) check this website:

<https://wvdnr.gov/french-creek-freddie-facts-to-get-you-ready-for-groundhog-day/>

Punxsutawney Phil's success rate for correct predictions is about 39-40%. French Creek Freddie claims 50%. Part of the challenge is that the term "early spring" is vague and not clearly defined.

