

Kids' KOrner

World Awaits Groundhog's Winter Forecast On Feb. 2

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Most kids have heard about Groundhog Day on February 2 each year. That's the day everybody waits to see if the groundhog will see his shadow. Of course, to see a shadow the sun must first be shining.

If he sees his shadow, it means there will be six more weeks of winter weather and he will return to his underground hibernation to wait it out. If he doesn't see his shadow, then spring should be just around the corner.

Punxsutawney, Pa., in Jefferson Co. is the home of the world's most famous groundhog. His name is "Punxsutawney Phil." He lives at a place called "Gobblers Knob."

Each year on Feb. 2, very early in the morning crowds of spectators and newsmen head for Gobblers Knob to see what Phil's forecast will be. At 5:30 in the morning, folks can ride shuttle buses to the scene of action. Later they hold their breath while the president of the Punxsutawney Groundhog Club (this year, Bud Dunkel) uses the symbolic acacia cane to tap on the door of Punxsutawney Phil's cozy, undisturbed burrow.

Then, it's my guess that Phil probably does a few good stretches after his long winter's nap, yawns hugely and finally pokes his head out of the ground. Seeing the cause of commotion, the aging aardvark no doubt says to himself, "Well, fresh grass and greens! Can it be Groundhog's Day again so soon? Seems like I just laid down minutes ago."

Then casting a wise eye over the crowd, he plays his part brilliantly, because he knows (secretly, of course) that the humans expect it.

This groundhog is so special and respected in Punxsutawney that his titles are many. He is the Seer of Seers, Prognosticator of Prognosticators, Fearless Forecaster and Unparalleled Weather Prophet. (Check your dictionary to learn these definitions.)

Other woodchucks have tried to outshine Phil but there is just one true Phil, said officials. In fact, officials don't hesitate to dismiss the others as being imposters, pretenders, fakers and johnny-come-latelys, who are attempting to ride Punxsutawney Phil's glory trail. Only Phil is the accurate weather forecaster on Feb. 2, they said.

Punxsutawney, is said to be the

largest community in Jefferson Co. in western-central Pennsylvania. Its population is approximately 8,000 persons. The earliest inhabitants there were Indians, starting with the Alligewi. When they migrated south, the Delaware and Iroquois soon arrived.

In 1849 the town officially became a borough. Nearly 40 years later, on Feb. 2, 1887, the first official trip was made to Gobblers Knob. Since then folks have listened each year for the weather word from Punxsutawney Phil on Feb. 2, 1994 is the 107th Groundhog Day anniversary.

Celebrations in Punxsutawney continue throughout Groundhog Day beginning with the trek to Gobblers Knob. Then everybody is invited to a big breakfast. All kinds of fun things happen during Groundhog Day. Groundhog souvenirs can be found everywhere.

The Groundhog Banquet is held in the evening. A Groundhog King And Queen are crowned at the local high school before the Groundhog Hop teen dance begins.

Foreign exchange students, representing many countries, attend the festivities and are treated like celebrities.

During the week of July 4, Punxsutawneyites go "groundhog wild" for seven days with the Punxsutawney Groundhog Festival. There are races, cook-offs, card shows, cycling, puppet shows, petting zoo, circus, and concerts.

There's the Child Evangelism Storyhouse, museum, clowns, Friendly Purple Dinosaur and hula hoop contest. That still leaves scads more things to see and do.

So it might be fun to check the location on the map or road atlas and plan to visit Punxsutawney. It's located 18 miles south of Interstate I-80, about midway between the towns of DuBois and Indiana.

Set the mood for Groundhog Day by whipping up something really groundhoggish. For instance, Groundhog Sundaes made with Chocolate Sauce and Spicy Groundhogs. Here's how.

GROUNDHOG SUNDAES

1 quart vanilla ice cream cut in slices

Groundhog cookies

Chocolate Sauce

Place groundhog cookie on center of ice cream slice.

Drizzle chocolate sauce across ice cream and plate to suggest a shadow.

SPICY GROUNDHOGS

2 cups sifted flour

1 cup sugar

1 teaspoon baking powder

1 teaspoon salt

½ teaspoon baking soda

1 teaspoon ground ginger

1 teaspoon ground cloves

1½ teaspoons cinnamon

½ cup soft butter

½ cup molasses

1 egg yolk

1 slightly beaten egg

Currants or raisins

Sift together flour, salt, soda, baking powder and spices. Set aside. Cream butter and sugar un-

til fluffy. Blend in molasses and egg yolk. Stir in flour mixture and mix well.

Form dough into a ball, wrap in plastic wrap or wax paper. Chill one hour or longer. Roll out small amount on a sugar sprinkled board to ¼-inch thickness. Cut out cookies with a lightly floured cutter. Place cookies on greased cookie sheet and brush with slightly beaten egg. Decorate cookie with the fruit for eyes, buttons and so forth. Bake at 350 degrees for 8-10 minutes. Cool slightly. Recipe makes 12 to 15 large groundhogs or 3 to 4 dozen

small ones.

CHOCOLATE SAUCE

4 ounces unsweetened chocolate

½ cup butter

¼ teaspoon salt

2 cups sifted confectioners' sugar

½ cup evaporated milk

1 teaspoon vanilla.

Melt chocolate and butter in the top of a double boiler over simmering water. Remove from heat and stir in sugar, salt, milk, and vanilla. Beat until smooth. Serve warm. Yields two cups of sauce.

A Look At Sperm Whales

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WASHINGTON, D.C. — An adult male can outweigh 10 elephants and would be able to see over a six-story building if it stood on its tail.

Its massive forehead contains an exceedingly fine oil, mistaken by early whalers as sperm, that was once used to lubricate Soviet space vehicles.

The sperm whale, relentlessly hunted in the 19th century for its oil, still roams all of Earth's oceans, its numbers now estimated at 1 million.

But little is known about the behavior of these strange, elusive animals, which can dive more than 2 miles; how distant tribes relate to each other, or the purpose of the peculiar clicking sounds they make.

A family of scientists, including their two small children, are midway through a yearlong voyage in a 41-foot sailboat to revisit the 19th-century Yankee whaling grounds in the South Pacific and explore the family secrets of the whales.

"We will examine the geographical variation in genetic structure and vocalization repertoire of the sperm whales of the South Pacific," says marine biologist Hal Whitehead of Nova Scotia's Dalhousie University.

"Most of the people who have studied sperm whales have chosen areas near islands where it gets deep very quickly, such as the Galapagos," says Peter L. Tyack of the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution. "But sperm whales are basically deep-sea animals, and the best place to study them is in the deep sea."

Whitehead and his wife, fellow marine biologist Linda Susan Weilgart, sailed down the coast of South America, then headed into the open South Pacific — through French Polynesia, American Samoa and other islands. After a stopover in New Zealand, they will sail back to the southern tip of Chile and cruise up the South American coast, returning to Nova Scotia in the spring.

Aboard their custom-built research cutter, Balaena, they are accompanied by their son, Benjamin, 5; 14-month-old daughter, Stefanie; graduate student Nathalie Jaquet and a nanny.

The sperm whale became an American cultural icon through Herman Melville's classic, "Moby Dick." Melville described the animal, which belongs to a family of toothed whales, as "the most formidable of all whales to encounter, the most majestic in aspect."

Because of its famed evasiveness, Melville's 1851 description of the whale is still largely true: "Far above all other hunted whales, his is an unwritten life."

All commercial whale hunting has been banned under a 1986 international agreement. But some whales still are being killed for scientific purposes. Critics have accused Japan, Iceland and Norway of violating the ban by killing excessive numbers under the guise of research.

Whitehead, whose work is supported partly by the National Geographic Society, is a pioneer of "benign research" techniques, designed to spare the lives of whales and to interfere as little as possible with their behavior.

Having the largest brain of any living creature, sperm whales, like humans, use a remarkably complex range of vocalizations.

Also like humans, whale parents care for their young for long periods. Adult whales cuddle their calves — and each other — by mouthing with their jaws, as though kissing.

Scientists have speculated that the clicking patterns of sperm whales, called codas, may be forms of communication, or mating calls, or a kind of sonar used to locate objects in the water — or all three.

It's even been suggested that the sounds may be used to stun prey, which could account for how the leviathans catch their dinners of fast-moving fish and squid.

One mystery is whether all sperm whales throughout the world share a common language of codas, or whether distant groups have different vocabularies. If the latter is true, researchers postulate that contact between groups would be limited, and this would be reflected by marked genetic differences among the various populations.

Whitehead is collecting sloughed skin samples of whales for analysis of mitochondrial and nuclear DNA, to find out if there are major variations.

Renowned among fellow whale researchers for his seamanship and ability to handle disasters, Whitehead has so far reported smooth sailing.

"The kids are loving it," says Dalhousie graduate student Mary Dillon, who talks to Whitehead periodically by radiotelephone from Nova Scotia. "The 5-year-old has seen all kinds of dolphins and manta rays, and he's been in the water snorkeling, having a great time."

As for the toddler, Dillon reports: "She'll actually be learning to walk on a boat."

