

FURRY FORECASTER. Groundhog day

Groundhog day is a very unusual traditional holiday celebrated in the USA and parts of Canada on February the 2nd. According to folklore, if it is cloudy when the groundhog in question leaves its burrow on this day, spring will arrive early. If it is sunny and the groundhog casts a shadow, winter will continue for another six weeks. Groundhogs begin their hibernation in autumn. Their body temperature falls significantly, and their heartbeats go from 80 to five in a minute. They can lose 30 per cent of their body fat. They actually emerge from their burrows to look for food and mates, not to predict the weather!

The origins of the tradition can be found thousands of years ago in Central Europe, in what is now Germany, when nature worship was common. People believed that badgers and even hedgehogs had the power to predict when spring would arrive. The tradition was still popular in the 18th century, when Germans started to emigrate to the USA, especially to Pennsylvania, and they took the tradition with them. There were not many badgers in Pennsylvania, however, so the Germans decided to use the native groundhogs.

The popularity of Groundhog Day really began in 1887 in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania. Clymer H. Freas, the editor of the local paper, the Punxsutawney spirit, began promoting the town's groundhog as the country's official groundhog. Groundhog day quickly became a popular tradition in Pennsylvania, and then in other states such as Georgia, North Carolina and Tennessee, and finally Canada. The celebration, however, is in Punxsutawney. The town's groundhog, Punxsutawney Phil, lives at Gobbler's Knob, at the top of a hill. Tens of thousands of visitors watch as Phil emerges from his simulated tree trunk home (he's actually pushed), in front of TV cameras from around the world. Phil has even met US presidents and appeared several times on television.

This strange tradition attracted global attention with the incredibly popular 1993 film comedy *Groundhog Day*, which made Punxsutawney Phil famous around the world. Starring Bill Murray and Andie Macdowell, the film tells the story of a cynical TV weatherman who has to cover the groundhog celebration. He is condemned to live the same day, february 2nd, again and again until finally,...you will have to see the film. The movie groundhog bit Murray twice during filming, and the actor needed a rabies injection. "Groundhog Day" has now become an accepted term in the English language. It means, not surprisingly, something that is repeated over and over again.

There is one obvious question that needs an answer. How accurate are Punxsutawney Phil's predictions? According to the town's Groundhog day organizers, the animal's forecasts are accurate to 75 to 90 per cent of the time. Weather experts actually reduce that figure to 39 per cent. They add that it would be a better idea simply to flip a coin.

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After reading the text choose the correct option:

- 1) During hibernation, the groundhog's heartbeats: a) keep the same b) slow down c) speed up
- 2) People in Pennsylvania: a) brought badgers with themselves b) stopped believing in hedgehogs c) substitute badgers for other animals
- 3) Which is not true: a) Phil has been in TV b) Phil has known important politicians C) Phil lives in a tree trunk
- 4) The groundhog_____ Bill Murray: a) beat B) hit D) chewed
- 5) According to scientists, the accuracy of the Groundhog is_____ of the times_: a) around three quarters b) less than 91% c) nearly four out of ten.