Natural predators... or not

Eagles and foxes are the marmot’s fiercest enemies in the wild. To defend itself, it has a 300° field of vision which allows it to see in front, behind and overhead. Its keen sense of smell and good hearing complete its range of defence.

Another threat comes from hikers who think they are being nice by sharing their biscuits and cereal bars with the marmots, forgetting that these animals don’t go to the supermarket or buy fast food. This can cause skin diseases and bad fats, and even prove fatal during hibernation.

THE EXPERT’S ANSWERS

1- **TRUE.** Marmots have glands that secrete an odorous liquid and they identify each other by smelling their cheeks.

2- **TRUE.** Marmots do not drink water, just dew and water from plants.

3- **TRUE.** But we have no photo to show you. A little privacy, please!

4- **FALSE.** A marmot’s hands are made for digging and don’t have thumbs.

5- **FALSE.** 1 km, but that’s still not bad, is it? See if you can do as much.

**THE ALPINE MARMOT**

- **Famille:** Sciuridae
- **Taille:** 50 to 60 cm
- **Life expectancy:** 15 to 18 years
- **Gestation:** 35 days
- **Litter:** 2 to 6 babies/year

**Special features**
- Great whistler
- Curious
- Don’t digest chocolate very well
IN THE BEGINNING

A tour of the world later
To follow in the footsteps of the first marmots, you will need a sturdy pair of shoes and quite a lot of time!
- 60 Million years ago
  Origin of the species in central Asia
- 15 Million years ago
  Conquered the Far West
- 1 Million years ago
  Arrived in Europe
- 100 000 years ago
  Made it to France

Alternatively, a hike of just a few hours in the Vanoise park will suffice to find the local representatives: Marmotta marmotta.

DAILY LIFE

I spent most of my time in the dark...
... but that doesn’t mean that I bump into the walls. With the vibrissa (whiskers) on my muzzle that act like SatNav, I find my way easily in the dark.
Comfortably installed in my burrow, I live with my whole tribe of around a dozen marmots (the parents and their children from the last 2 or 3 years). I am a diurnal animal, getting up before the sunrise and going to bed an hour before sunset. During the day, I play, dig, have lunch, have dinner and sleep a lot; often with my eyes open, in Neighbourhood Watch style.

HABITAT

It is in the mountains, 1000 to 3000 m above sea level, on soft ground made of stones and scree, that marmots set up their summer quarters and dig their winter burrows.

OUTSTANDING BUILDERS

Marmots use their front paws to dig and their back paws to clear the earth, a technique that the heroes of The Great Escape would envy!... The animal is perfectly built for digging tunnels. But that’s not all. Marmots are also experienced architects, capable of designing a burrow of over 100 tunnels, with a bedroom, toilets, emergency exits and a small, south-facing terrace... opening on to 1 to 4 ha of terrain.

THE APPETITE OF AN OGRE

After 6 months without eating, I obviously spend the rest of the year eating as much as I can. I eat 400g/day in two meals, the equivalent of 6kg/day for you. Over 6 months, that is a total of 70 kg.

My favourite menu:
• Apero: a few insects, grasshoppers...
• Starter: dandelion salad
• Main course: légumes
• Dessert: some berries and flowers

TRUE OR FALSE?

1/ To identify each other, marmots give each other a big kiss on the cheek.
2/ Marmots eat a lot, but they aren’t big drinkers.
3/ Marmots groom themselves like cats.
4/ Marmots stick their thumb out to hitchhike from one spot to another.
5/ A marmot’s whistle can be heard over 2 km away.

Answers on the back page