



Yellow-Bellied Marmot (*Marmota flaviventris*)

General Description:

Yellow-bellied marmots (*Marmota flaviventris*) belong to the Sciuridae family. They have the thickest build of all *Marmota* species and weigh 2-5 kg (4.4-11 lbs). The males are slightly heavier and larger than the females, with males averaging 62 cm (25 in) and females 57 cm (23 in) in length. *M. flaviventris* is recognizable by its distinctive yellow-brown or tan, white-tipped straight hairs; yellow-speckled necks; white coloring between their eyes; and yellow or red-yellow bellies. However, melanism can be common south of the Rocky Mountains. The animal is diurnal and mostly terrestrial, although they live in underground burrows and occasionally climb shrubs and trees.

Distribution:

Yellow-bellied marmots are found from south central British Columbia and southern Alberta through the western US.

Habitat:

This marmot usually occupies open habitats, including alpine meadows, talus fields, pastures, steppes, and forest edges. Each male's territory is about 6500 m² (1.6 acres) and a colony may be 20-30,000 m² (5-7 acres). The species is found in low to mid elevations in the northern part of its range, with presence occurring in progressively higher elevations in the southern portions of its range. In the southern most extent of its range, the yellow-bellied marmot is only found above 2000 m (6560 ft). *M. flaviventris* has been observed at up to 4100 m (13,450 ft).

Status:

M. flaviventris is common throughout their range. They have no special conservation status, but populations in the Black Hills and on mountains in the southern part of the range may be at risk due to isolation.

Where to see it in the Network:

Of the 11 *M. flaviventris* subspecies, visitors may catch a glimpse of the charismatic *M. flaviventris flaviventris* at Lava Beds National Monument, Lassen Volcanic National Park, and Crater Lake National Park.



Interesting Fact:

The only US holiday named after an animal, Groundhog Day, is named after a marmot!

Behavior:

Yellow-bellied marmots are the best studied marmot species. They have a harem-polygynous social system, with a male defending his harem of 1-4 females. Colonies (groups of harems in the same area) may have 10-20 individuals. About 90% of yellow-bellied marmots live in these social groups. Adult males are territorial and agonistic towards each other; females are amicable and often jointly raise the young. Each male marmot digs a burrow with several entrances in well-drained soil for his harem. The burrows are about 1 m (3.3 ft) deep, with tunnels 10-70 m (33-230 ft) long between them! Hibernation burrows may be 5-7 m (16.5-23 ft) deep. These burrows are dug under rocks to camouflage them from predators. If a predator does come by, the marmots make a variety of alarm calls to alert other members of the colony. *M. flaviventris* spends the warm months sunning, grooming, and foraging. In September, they enter the burrows for a hibernation that lasts until May (depending on elevation). If all goes well, yellow-bellied marmots may live to be 15 years old.

Feeding:

Yellow-bellied marmots aren't picky eaters. They eat the leaves and blossoms of many plants, as well as grasses, fruits, seeds, and the occasional bird egg or insect. *M. flaviventris* must fatten up through the summer in order to survive winter hibernation off of their fat reserves.

More Information:

Frase, B. A., and R. S. Hoffmann. 1980. *Marmota flaviventris*. Mammalian Species 135:1-8.

[University of Michigan Museum of Zoology Animal Diversity Web](#)

[UCLA Marmot Burrow](#)