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Small Mammals

WOLVERINE

Gulo gulo

Identification

- 38–47 inches long, 13–31 pounds.
- Largest member of weasel family; compact and strongly built, broad head, short legs; black to dark brown with white on chest that may extend as bands onto sides; shaggy appearance due to long guard hairs.

Habitat

- Found in high-elevation conifer forests and alpine tundra; rarely seen.
- Eat burrowing rodents, birds, eggs, beavers, squirrels, marmots, mice, and vegetation (including whitebark pine nuts); chiefly a scavenger in winter, but has also been known to take large prey such as deer or elk.

YELLOW-BELLIED MARMOT

Marmota flaviventris

Identification

- 20–28 inches long; 3.5–11 pounds.
- One of the largest rodents in Yellowstone.
- Reddish-brown upper body; yellowish belly; small ears; prominent active tail.

Habitat

- Found from lowest valleys to alpine tundra, usually in open grassy communities and almost always near rocks.
- Feed on grasses and forbs in early summer; switch to seeds in late summer, occasionally will eat insects.



Behavior

- Active year-round, intermittently throughout the day
- Breed April to October; 1 litter of 2–4 young each year.
- Den in deep snow, under log jams and uprooted trees in avalanche chutes.
- Mostly solitary except when breeding.

Research

From 2005–2009, researchers gathered information about this species in eastern Yellowstone National Park and the adjoining Shoshone and Gallatin national forests. Animals were live-trapped and fitted with GPS collars to track their movement. Wolverines were present in the southeast corner of Yellowstone and in the Gallatin National Forest, north of the park.

- Preyed on by coyotes, grizzlies, and golden eagles.

Behavior

- Hibernate up to 8 months, emerging from February to May depending on elevation; may estivate in June in response to dry conditions and lack of green vegetation and reappear in late summer.
- Breed within two weeks of emerging from hibernation; average 5 young per year.
- Active in morning, late afternoon, and evening.
- Colonies consist of one male, several females, plus young of the year.
- Vocalizations include a loud whistle (early settlers called them “whistle pigs”), a “scream” used for fear and excitement; a quiet tooth chatter that may be a threat.
- Males are territorial; dominance and aggressiveness demonstrated by waving tail slowly back and forth.