

**Cannibalistic Yellow-Bellied Marmot, Desolation Wilderness, CA  
Observed by Nick Waterstraat**

The following account is of an event that took place June 25, near Lake Aloha in Desolation Wilderness, which is a little west of South Lake Tahoe, California.

After photographing American Pika and Yellow-Bellied Marmot for most of the evening, the sun had already passed behind the mountains and the light was starting to die so I grabbed my stuff and started to head around the lake inlet to my campsite. I heard a rustling and turned around to see a largish marmot running across the path I had just walked down with something in its mouth. As I took a few pictures, I started to see that what was in its mouth was clearly some kind of squirrel and looked very dead. Closer inspection of the pictures shows that it is a young marmot that appears to have wounds to the throat, neck, and back. I followed the marmot to watch what it was doing with the corpse, and as it ran, it stopped a few times to tear at the body, by clamping down with its foot on some part and then pulling away with its mouth, something that I could only chalk up to it feeding on the younger marmot. It ran up and around the rocky bluff and then down into a small gap below a boulder, then came out after a short time to continue feeding on the younger marmot (it always carried the body with it, never leaving it unattended). After a while I tried to move in for a closer look and it disappeared, taking the corpse with it.









Once I got home, I did a quick search for literature on cannibalism amongst marmots. One notable result came up, (“Cannibalism among Yellow-Bellied Marmots”, Armitage, Johns, and Anderson 1979) noting that this behavior was rare (seen only 3 times in over 3000 hours of observation) and not part of typical marmot reproductive strategy. I only witnessed the event after the younger marmot was already dead, so I can’t say whether this was aggressive or opportunistic cannibalism, but the wounds certainly look like the juvenile was killed by some kind of attack, whether from a marmot, marten, or something else, and the marmot carrying the body was certainly trying to get away quickly. The next morning, I learned a little more about the path that the marmots take and a potential den that was right along the path of where that marmot was very quickly scurrying away from with the corpse.