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Some Like It Warm (If They're Marmots)

By **KENNETH CHANG**

Warmer temperatures in the Colorado Rockies have produced a population boom of yellow-bellied marmots, at least in one well-studied valley.

In an unusual, long-term study, scientists have been tracking marmots there since 1962. A new paper compares marmots from 1976 through 2008 to look for the effects of [global warming](#) on the animals.

Over that time, the winter thaws have been arriving sooner, and the marmots have been emerging out of hibernation earlier — the first sighting of a marmot now comes around April 20, a month earlier than in 1976.

That gives them more time to eat and grow, and the result is that [a female marmot was on average about 7.6 pounds](#) during the second half of the observational period, about three-quarters of a pound more than the average in earlier years, researchers reported in the current issue of the journal Nature.

Until 2000, the population remained steady at about 100. But as the marmots got heavier and the winters shorter the percentage surviving winter hibernation rose to 80 percent from 70 percent. The population has since tripled.

The data on the marmots give some hints of how different species might react to a changing environment. (By contrast, scientists reported last year that [warmer winters on a Scottish isle led to smaller sheep](#), because smaller lambs that would have starved to death in the past now survive.)

And although marmots in the valley, which now number 300, are thriving today, continued global warming may not be such good news, the researchers warned, because of the increased chance of summer droughts.

This article has been revised to reflect the following correction:

Correction: July 29, 2010

A report in the Observatory column on Tuesday about the effect of warming temperatures on yellow-bellied marmots in Colorado left the incorrect impression that researchers had observed the marmots going back into hibernation later in the fall. The scientists who made a long-term study observed only the marmots' coming out of hibernation earlier in the spring.

