

## Note on a Yellow-throated Marten *Martes flavigula* scavenging on a domestic cow carcass

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### Abstract

A Yellow-throated Marten *Martes flavigula* was observed feeding on a domestic cow *Bos taurus* carcass on 30 March 2023 in the Mussoorie Wildlife Sanctuary, Uttarakhand, India.

**Keywords:** India, Mustelidae, Mussoorie Wildlife Sanctuary, Western Himalaya

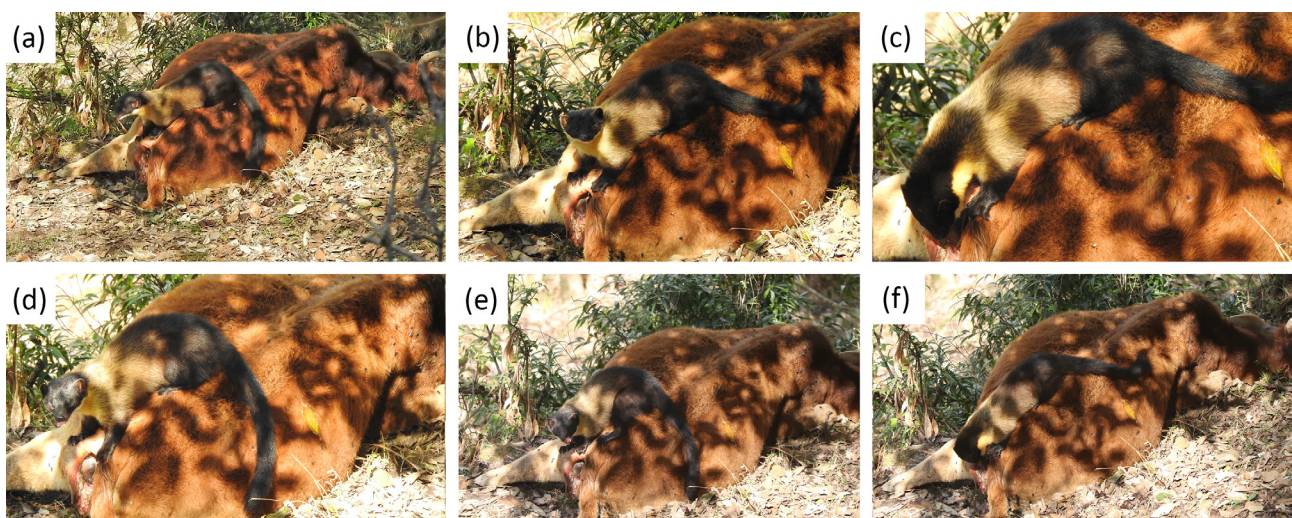
Yellow-throated Martens *Martes flavigula* are known to typically prey on smaller animals, such as rodents, birds, reptiles and insects, though they have also been observed to prey on larger animals such as Siberian Musk-deer *Moschus moschiferus* (Heptner et al. 1967, Zhou et al. 2011). There are records of Yellow-throated Marten feeding on mammal carcasses (Pocock 1941, Pierce et al. 2014, Oleynikov et al. 2023).

At approximately 15h00, on 30 March 2023, while observing birds, we came across a pair of Yellow-throated Martens near Mussoorie Wildlife Sanctuary, Uttarakhand (30°27'53"N, 78°0'51"E; 2076 m asl). The observation was in a deciduous forest dominated by Ban Oak *Quercus leucotrichophora*. The martens were observed on the carcass of a domestic cow. The cause of the cow's death was unknown; no wounds or bite marks could be seen on the parts of it that were visible to us. It was difficult to ascertain the stage of decomposition of the carcass, but it appeared to be fairly fresh as there was no putrid odour emanating from it and the majority of the body was intact, with a few flies hovering around it.

The martens were observed for about 35 minutes and at distance of 20 m. One marten was feeding on the carcass, tearing into the flesh and consuming it, whilst the other individual groomed itself nearby. The marten that was scavenging fed from the posterior part of the carcass where the anal opening was (Fig. 1). Small scavengers usually access intact carcasses of large animals through the anal and buccal cavities or areas where the skin is broken by lesions, because the thick hide of such carcasses is difficult to penetrate (Wallace & Temple 1987).

Pierce et al. (2014) observed a Yellow-throated Marten feeding on a dead Red Muntjac *Muntiacus muntjak* in Huai Kha Khaeng Wildlife Sanctuary. Additionally, from India, this species has been reported to chase Red Muntjac, Himalayan Tahr *Hemitragus jemlahicus*, Alpine Musk-deer *Moschus chrysogaster* and Himalayan Goral *Naemorhedus goral*; however, the results of these pursuits remain undetermined (Naniwadekar et al. 2013, Sathyakumar 1999).

Other species of marten, such as European Pine Marten *Martes martes* and Stone Marten *Martes foina*, have been recorded scavenging. Through scat analy-



**Fig. 1.** Yellow-throated Marten *Martes flavigula* feeding on a domestic cow carcass, Mussoorie Wildlife Sanctuary, India, 30 March 2023. (Photos: Tribhuwan Singh and Daniel Miranda.)



sis, Jędrzejewska et al. (1993) documented Pine Martens feeding on carcasses of Wild Pig *Sus scrofa*, deer, and domestic cattle *Bos taurus* in Poland. On the basis of direct observations and indirect signs like scat or tracks around the carcass, another study in Poland reported Pine Martens feeding on the carcasses of European Bison *Bos bonasus*; they would tunnel into the carcass from small openings to access the innards (Selva et al. 2003). Analysis of Stone Marten faeces in Tuscany, Italy, revealed the hair of larger herbivores such as Wild Pig and Roe Deer *Capreolus capreolus*, suggesting that the martens were feeding on carrion (Genovesi et al. 1996).

The observation was made approximately 20 m downhill from an unpaved road. The carcass was visible from the road. The martens didn't seem to be disturbed by us or the passing traffic and continued feeding on the carcass. This observation is one of the few known records of Yellow-throated Marten scavenging on larger mammals.

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