

## IIISTORY OF THE RACCOON (*Procyon lotor* L.) IN NOVA SCOTIA<sup>1</sup>

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SMITH (1940, *Amer. Midl. Nat.*, 24, p.225) summarized the status of the raccoon in Nova Scotia as fairly common in the Annapolis Valley, and occasional in the interior of the province. He cites Gilpin (1870, *Proc. and Trans. Nova Scotia Inst. Nat. Sci.*, 2 (part 2) p. 64) who wrote that during the preceding twenty years the raccoon had entered the province and spread along the north side of the Annapolis Valley and that it was strange to the Indians. Gilpin also pointed out that Lescarbot had described the raccoon from Nova Scotia about 1606, and that it had evidently disappeared in the period between and was now reappearing.

Lescarbot's description (1914, *Pub. Champlain Soc.*, Lescarbot, History of New France, Vol. III) of a beast called *nibaches* which had paws almost like those of an ape; a head like a fox; a grey coat; and of an incredible fatness is certainly this animal. It is of further interest that this word for the raccoon was not used by the modern Micmac.

Evidence of the occurrence of the raccoon in still earlier times is available in the Archaeological collection of the National Museum of Canada. From Pictou County we have the following material:-

From a shell heap on Quarry Island: 5 incomplete lower jaws that compare well with skulls collected in recent years in eastern Canada.

From a shell heap on Robinson Point, Big Island, Mengonish; two canine teeth.

From a shell heap on nearby Olding Island; two canine teeth.

The above were collected by Harlan I. Smith in 1914.

Smith and Wintemberg (1929, *Nat. Mus. Can. Bull.* No. 47) have described these finds in detail. Of the age of the material they say certainly prehistoric, but nothing indicates

they are very old. No object clearly belonging to the shell heaps has been obtained from the whites.

Among the bones from the Eisenhauer shell heaps, Mahone Bay, Lunenburg Co., of similar age Smith and Wintemberg (op. cit.) list those of the raccoon, and say its remains are more common than are those of the lynx, caribou, porcupine, woodchuck, muskrat and hare. We can assume it was common.

It appears that sometime before the arrival of the European in Canada raccoons were common and widely distributed over the mainland of Nova Scotia, not only in the Transition Zone of the Annapolis Valley, but through the Canadian Zone as well, to be common at Mahone Bay. It apparently existed up until the beginning of the seventeenth century when Lescarbot recorded it with its Indian name.

Evidently then it disappeared and the Indians lost all knowledge of it, including the name. In Gilpin's time (1870) it was reappearing again and is now fairly common over parts of the province.

Such evidence and similar evidence for the white-tailed deer, should be carefully considered when evaluating the balance of nature, and in broad views of conservation. Certain animals have evolved, flourished and waned; perhaps with successive periods of abundance without aid or hindrance from man. We have no evidence the process has stopped.

Additional evidence remains to be gathered from archaeological material (see Wintemberg, *Can. Field-Nat.*, 33, p. 63-72). One of the most interesting finds would be remains of the large sea mink *Mustela macrodon* (Prentiss), of which we have no record for Nova Scotia. It is known from bones in the shell heaps of Maine and probably became extinct within historic times, as certain measurements and accounts of early skins are tentatively referred to this animal.

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