



THE KANGAROO.
(MACROPUS MAJOR.)

Sydney, N. S. W.—Thomas Richards, Government Printer.—1868.

From a photograph from life by Victor A. Gould.

Great Kangaroo.

(MACROPUS MAJOR. *Young Male.*)

It is just a century since Captain Cook discovered the Common or Great Kangaroo in the neighbourhood of Port Jackson, and notwithstanding all the persecution by man and dog these large Marsupials still hold their ground.* From the vicinity of the City they have certainly disappeared, but in the Port Hacking District, on the south side of Botany Bay, a few may yet be found. The nearest spot where good sport can be obtained is Jervis Bay, to which locality regular hunting parties proceed, and generally return with good "bags" or rather "cart-loads" of game.

The distribution of the Great Kangaroo appears to be confined to Tasmania and the southern portions of the mainland; the animal does not occur on the West Coast, where another allied species (*Macropus ocydromus*) takes its place, nor do we remember that the Common Kangaroo has been observed very far north.

In some districts the settlers are obliged to have regular battues to keep the Kangaroos within bounds, because they feed voraciously and multiply so quickly that sheep or cattle would soon be outnumbered by them. The main cause of this prolific increase is no doubt the destruction of the Native Dog and the absence of the aboriginal hunting parties. The fur of the Kangaroo is rather short and woolly, the prevailing colour a brownish grey, the under side of the body, inner parts of legs and the arms being lighter; the tarsi and toes are black. The male exceeds the female in size, but there is no difference in the colour of the sexes.

When a herd of Kangaroos is disturbed, the old males keep in the rear, the fleetest females and young going off first; and it is astonishing to see the large space of ground they cover at a single bound when hotly pursued. Few artists have however attempted to illustrate the precise way in which these animals progress; even our best authors represent them as running like greyhounds (See Gould's "Mammals of Australia," plate 34), but if really they attempted to do so they could not avoid going "head over heels."

The whole tribe progresses by a succession of jumps, using the hind legs only, and the tail to balance the body; the arms are pressed close to the chest; the heavy tail forms a gentle curve, but never touches the ground; and the two elastic tarsi come down together at regular intervals with a heavy thud. When feeding on short herbage the arms and hands rest on the ground, and the tail with the hind legs form a sort of tripod. In this fashion the Kangaroo moves by raising the tarsi (the body resting on the tail and fore-legs) and pushing them forward.

Few animals are more graceful when running than those of the Kangaroo tribe; but, as we mentioned before, artists will not take the trouble to observe them, and the consequence is that, when a sketch is attempted, a caricature is the result. We appeal to the rising generation to study nature, and trust they will learn to draw a Kangaroo as carefully as they learn to draw a Horse or a Dog, and that they will discontinue to accept as correct the ludicrous representation of the animals which have hitherto supported the Australian Shield under the names of Kangaroo and Emu.

* We caution students against placing implicit belief in the statements of foreign writers about Australia, let the name of the author be ever so much respected. Mrs. Somerville, in her famous book, "Physical Geography," in the fourth revised edition to boot, tells us that the pouched tribe (p. 472) vary from the size of a large dog to a mouse; that the Banded Kangaroo is found only in the islands in Shark's Bay, on the West Coast of New South Wales; that there are only fifty-three species of terrestrial Mammalia in Australia altogether; that the rodents are all aquatic, and very peculiar; and that the Phalangers burrow in the sand. We are also informed that the Kangaroos have become scarce near the British Colonies, and that the whole of the native animals are likely to be soon extirpated. (With Wallaby skins by the thousand, at 3d. each.) We conclude with an extract from page 269:—"The Macquarie is called the Fish River between Bathurst and Sydney."



Krefft, Johan Ludwig Gerhard. 1871. "Great Kangaroo (*Macropus major*). [Plate X]." *The mammals of Australia : illustrated by Miss Harriett Scott, and Mrs. Helena Forde, for the Council of Education; with a short account of all the species hitherto described* 1–1. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.314739>.

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