GENUS BASSARIS.—LICHTENSTEIN.

DENTAL FORMULA.

$$\text{Incisive } \frac{6}{6}; \text{ Canine } \frac{1-1}{1-1}; \text{ Molar, } \frac{6-6}{6-6} = 40.$$

Body, long and rather slender; head, round; snout, attenuated like that of a fox; eyes, rather large; eyelids, oblong, lateral; ears, conspicuous, of moderate size, their points rounded.

There are five toes on each foot; tail, nearly the length of the body.

Hairs on the body, short and dense, much longer on the tail.

The specific name is derived from the Greek, *Βασσαρις*, (*bassaris*), a little fox.

This is the only species in the genus.

BASSARIS ASTUTA.—LICHT.

RING-TAILED BASSARIS.

PLATE XCVIII.—MALE.

B. Supra gilvus nigro-variegatus, auriculis, macula supra oculari et ventre flavido-albis; cauda, annulis octo albis nigrisque alternantibus, picta.

CHARACTERS.

Dull yellow, mixed with black, above; a spot above the eye, ears, and under surface, yellowish-white; tail, eight times ringed with black and white.

SYNONYMES.

CACAMITZTLI, Hernandez.

TEPE-MAXTLATON, Hernandez.

BASSARIS ASTUTA, Lichtenstein, Darstellung neuer, oder wenig bekannter Säugthiere, Tafel 43, Berlin, 1827-1834.

DESCRIPTION.

The first impression made by this animal on the observer is, that he has met with a little fox; its erect ears, sharp nose, and cunning look, are

On Stone by W^m E. Hitchcock

Ring-Tailed Bassaris

Drawn from Nature by J. W. Audubon

Lith. Printed & Col^d by J. T. Bowen, Phil

all fox-like. It however, by its long and moveable muzzle approaches the civets, (*viverra*,) the genets, (*gennetta*,) and the coatis (*ictides*.)

The head is small ; skull, not much flattened ; nose, long ; muzzle, pointed, naked ; moustaches, numerous, long and rigid ; ears, long, erect, ovate, clothed with short hair on the outer surface ; sparingly within ; neck and body, long ; legs, longer than those of the martens, but shorter than those of the fox ; nails, sharp and much hooked ; toes, covered with hairs concealing them ; palms, naked ; tail, with long coarse hairs, containing scarcely any under fur ; the inner hair on the back, is of moderate fineness, interspersed with rather coarser and longer hairs. The longer hairs on the back are about an inch in length, those on the tail, two inches, and the under-fur, on the back, half an inch.

COLOUR.

The hair on the back is grayish, for three-fourths of its length from the roots, then pale yellowish-white, then yellowish-brown, deepening into black at the tips ; the under-fur is first plumbeous, then yellowish-white ; this disposition of colours gives it a brindled brownish-black appearance on the head and upper surface. Moustaches, black ; point of nose, dark brown. There is a light grayish spot above the eye ; ears, chin, throat, neck and belly, yellowish-white. The tail is regularly and conspicuously ringed with bars of white and black, alternately ; the upper white one very indistinct ; the next black-obscure and increasing in more conspicuous bands of white and black to the end, which is broadly tipped with black ; on the upper surface of tail, the black colours predominate, and on the under surface, the white.

DIMENSIONS.

	Feet.	Inches.
From point of nose to root of tail, - -	1	6
Tail, (vertebræ), - - - - -	1	2
“ to end of hair, - - - - -	1	4
From point of nose to head, between the ears, -	-	3 $\frac{1}{8}$
Height of ear, posteriorly, - - - - -	-	1 $\frac{3}{8}$
Breadth of ear at base, - - - - -	-	1
From shoulder to end of toes, - - - - -	-	6
Length of longest moustache, - - - - -	-	3 $\frac{1}{4}$

HABITS.

The greater portion of Texas is prairie-land, and it is chiefly along the water courses, that trees are found growing together in numbers sufficient to constitute a "wood." On certain level and clayey portions of the prairie, however, the land is swampy, and is covered with several kinds of oaks and a few other trees. The well-known musquit tree or bush is found generally distributed in the western parts of the State. It resembles the acacia in leaf, and has a small white pea-shaped blossom; at a distance it looks something like an old peach tree. Its wood is similar to coarse mahogany in appearance, and burns well, in fact beautifully, as the coals keep in for a long time; and the wood gives out little or no smoke. The musquit bottoms are furnished with these trees, they are small, about the size of the alder, and grow much in the same way; the musquit has sharp thorns. The musquit grass, (*Holcus lanatus*), resembles what is called, guinea grass, it is broader, shorter, softer, and more curly.

The general features of the State of Texas, as it will be seen by the foregoing, do not indicate a country where many tree-climbing animals could be found, and the present beautiful species, which Professor LICH-TENSTEIN most appropriately named *Bassaritis astuta*, is by no means common. It is a lively, playful, and nimble creature, leaps about on the trees, and has very much the same actions as the squirrel, which it resembles in agility and grace, always having a hole in the tree upon which it resides, and betaking itself to that secure retreat at once if alarmed.

The *Bassaritis Astuta* is shy and retired in its habits, and in the daytime often stays in its hole in some tree, so that we were only able to procure about half a-dozen of these animals during our stay in Texas; among which, to our regret, there was not a single female.

The food of this species is chiefly small animals, birds, and insects; they also eat nuts, as we were told, descending from their hiding place and travelling to the pecan and other trees, for the purpose of feeding on the nuts which, if true, is singular, as they are decidedly carnivorous in their dentition.

They are much attached to the tree on which they live, which is generally a post-oak, a live-oak, or other large tree, and they seldom quit the immediate vicinity of their hole, unless when driven out by thrusting a stick at them, when they ascend the trunk of the tree, and jump about among the higher branches so long as the pole is held close to their nest; as soon as this is withdrawn, they descend and at once re-enter their dwelling-place and hide themselves. These animals have a singular habit of

eating or gnawing off the bark around the mouth of their holes, and where the bark does not appear freshly peeled off at their hole, you may be certain the animal is not at home, or has deserted the place. Their holes are generally the result of natural decay, and are situated on knobs, or at the ends of branches broken short off close to the main trunk.

They generally select a hole of this kind on the lower side of a leaning tree, probably for better protection from the rain ; their holes vary in depth, but are seldom more than about a foot or eighteen inches to the bottom ; they are usually furnished with moss or grass, for bedding. Sometimes pecan shells are found in these holes, which no doubt affords presumptive evidence that the *Bassar* feeds upon this nut.

When scolding or barking at an intruder, the ring-tailed Raccoon, (as this animal is called by the Texans), holds the tail over its back, bending it squirrel fashion ; this animal, however, does not stand upon his hind feet like a squirrel, and cannot jump or leap so far. We have not heard of their springing from one branch to another beyond the distance of about ten feet, and when frightened at the presence of a man, they will sometimes run along a branch even toward him, in order to get within jumping distance of another, evincing more timidity than a squirrel exhibits in springing among the boughs, although they run up the bark with ease, holding on with their claws.

Sometimes the Ring-tailed *Bassar* may be seen squatted on the top of a branch, basking in the sun, and half rolled up, appearing almost asleep. On the slightest manifestation of danger, however, he darts into his hole, (which is always within a foot or two of his basking place), and he is seen no more. We have the impression that only one of these singular animals is to be found on a tree at a time—they, therefore, are not very social in their habits, and, as the live-oak and other trees are generally very much scattered, and many of them have no holes suitable for residences for the *Bassar*, it is very difficult to procure one. At the foot of many of the trees whereon they dwell, the cactus, brush-wood, and chapperal generally are so thick and tangled, that a man would be pretty well scratched should he attempt to penetrate the thorny, prickly thicket which surrounds the dwelling-place of this solitary and singular animal.

Notwithstanding the shyness and retired habits of this species, it is easily tamed, and when it has been confined in a cage a sufficient length of time, is frequently let loose in the houses of the Mexicans, where it answers the purpose of a playful pet, and catches mice and rats. We have seen one that was thus domesticated, running about the streets of a little Mexican village, and we were informed that one was kept as a great pet in a Camanche camp, visited by the Indian who hunted for us during

our explorations of the western part of Texas. As far as we could ascertain, the northern limit of the range of this species is somewhere in the neighbourhood of the southern branches of Red river. As you travel south they are more abundant, and probably are found throughout all Mexico; we were informed by our friend, the celebrated Col. HAYS, the Ranger, that he saw them more abundant in the mountainous region near the head-waters of the San Saba river than at any other place.

The *Bassar* produces three or four young at a birth, as has been ascertained from the animal kept in confinement.

GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION.

This animal exists in Mexico, and is common in the immediate vicinity of the capital of that name; our specimens were obtained in Texas, which appears to be its northern limit.

GENERAL REMARKS.

This species is called by the Mexicans *caco-mixtle*. It is mentioned no less than four times by HERNANDEZ under the names of *Cacamiztli* and *Tepe-Maxtlaton*. The first specimens were sent to Berlin in 1826, by Mr. DEPPE, and the earliest scientific description was given by LICHTENSTEIN, who named it as above.

Audubon, John James and Bachman, John. 1851. "Bassaridastuta, Ring-tailed Bassaris [Pl. XCVIII, male]." *The quadrupeds of North America* 2, 314–318.
<https://doi.org/10.5962/p.322376>.

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