CANIS LUPUS.—LINN.—(VAR. ALBUS.)

WHITE AMERICAN WOLF.

PLATE LXXII.—MALE.

C. magnitudine formaque C. lupi; vellere flavido-albo; naso canescente.

CHARACTERS.

Size and shape of the grey wolf, fur over the whole body of a yellowish-white colour, with a slight tinge of grey on the nose.

SYNONYMES.

WHITE WOLF, Lewis and Clark, vol. i., p. 107, vol. iii., p. 263.

CANIS LUPUS, Albus, Sabine, Frank. Journ., p. 652.

WHITE WOLF, Frank. Journal, p. 312.

“ “ Lyon's Private Journal, p. 279.

LUPUS ALBUS VAR. B. WHITE WOLF, Richardson, F. B. A., p. 68.

DESCRIPTION.

In shape, this Wolf resembles all the other varieties of large North American Wolves. (The prairie or barking Wolf, a distinct and different species, excepted.) It is large, stout, and compactly built; the canine teeth are long; others stout, large, rather short. Eyes, small. Ears, short and triangular. Feet, stout. Nails, strong and trenchant. Tail, long and bushy. Hairs on the body, of two kinds; the under coat composed of short, soft and woolly hair, interspersed with longer coarse hair five inches in length. The hairs on the head and legs are short and smooth, having none of the woolly appearance of those on other portions of the body.

COLOUR.

The short fur beneath the long white coat, yellowish white, the whole outer surface white, there is a slight tinge of greyish on the nose. Nails black; teeth white.

Another Specimen.—Snow-white on every part of the body except the tail, which is slightly tipped with black.

On Stone by W^m E. Hitchcock

White American Wolf

Another.—Light grey on the sides legs and tail; a dark brown stripe on the back, through which many white hairs protrude, giving it the appearance of being spotted with brown and white. This variety resembles the young Wolf noticed by RICHARDSON, (p. 68) which he denominates the pied Wolf.

DIMENSIONS.

							Feet.	Inches.
From point of nose to root of tail,	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	6
Do. tail, vertebræ,	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	2
Do. do. end of hair,	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	8
Height of ear,	-	-	-	-	-	-		3½

HABITS.

The White Wolf is far the most common variety of the Wolf tribe to be met with around Fort Union, on the prairies, and on the plains bordering the Yellow Stone river. When we first reached Fort Union we found Wolves in great abundance, of several different colours, white, grey, and brindled. A good many were shot from the walls during our residence there, by EDWARD HARRIS, Esq., and Mr. J. G. BELL. We arrived at this post on the 12th of June, and although it might be supposed at that season the Wolves could procure food with ease, they seemed to be enticed to the vicinity of the Fort by the cravings of hunger. One day soon after our arrival, Mr. CULBERTSON told us that if a Wolf made its appearance on the prairie, near the Fort, he would give chase to it on horseback, and bring it to us alive or dead. Shortly after, a Wolf coming in view, he had his horse saddled and brought up, but in the meantime the Wolf became frightened and began to make off, and we thought Mr. CULBERTSON would never succeed in capturing him. We waited, however, with our companions on the platform inside the walls, with our heads only projecting above the pickets, to observe the result. In a few moments we saw Mr. CULBERTSON on his prancing steed as he rode out of the gate of the Fort with gun in hand, attired only in his shirt, breeches and boots. He put spurs to his horse and went off with the swiftness of a jockey bent upon winning a race. The Wolf trotted on and every now and then stopped to gaze at the horse and his rider, but soon finding that he could no longer indulge his curiosity with safety, he suddenly galloped off with all his speed, but he was too late in taking the alarm, and the gallant steed soon began to gain on the poor cur, as we saw the horse rapidly shorten the distance between the Wolf and his enemy. Mr. CULBERTSON fired off his gun as a signal to us that he felt sure of bringing in

the beast, and although the hills were gained by the fugitive, he had not time to make for the broken ground and deep ravines, which he would have reached in few minutes, when we heard the crack of the gun again, and Mr. CULBERTSON galloping along dexterously picked up the slain Wolf without dismounting from his horse, threw him across the pommel of his saddle, wheeled round and rode back to the Fort, as fast as he had gone forth, a hard shower of rain being an additional motive for quickening his pace, and triumphantly placed the trophy of his chase at our disposal. The time occupied, from the start of the hunter, until his return with his prize did not exceed twenty minutes. The jaws of the animal had become fixed, and it was quite dead. Its teeth had scarified one of Mr. CULBERTSON's fingers considerably, but we were assured that this was of no importance, and that such feats as the capture of this wolf were so very common, that no one considered it worthy of being called an exploit.

Immediately after this real wolf hunt, a sham Buffalo chase took place, a prize of a suit of clothes being provided for the rider who should load and shoot the greatest number of times in a given distance. The horses were mounted, and the riders started with their guns empty—loaded in a trice, while at speed, and fired first on one side and then on the other, as if after Buffaloes. Mr. CULBERTSON fired eleven times in less than half a mile's run, the others fired less rapidly, and one of them snapped several times, but as a snap never brings down a Buffalo, these mishaps did not count. We were all well pleased to see these feats performed with much ease and grace. None of the riders were thrown, although they suffered their bridles to drop on their horses necks, and plied the whip all the time. Mr. CULBERTSON's mare, which was of the full, black foot Indian breed, about five years old, was highly valued by that gentleman, and could not have been purchased of him for less than four hundred dollars.

To return to the wolves. — These animals were in the habit of coming at almost every hour of the night, to feed in the troughs where the offal from the Fort was deposited for the hogs. On one occasion, a wolf killed by our party was devoured during the night, probably by other prowlers of the same species.

The white wolves are generally fond of sitting on the tops of the eminences, or small hills in the prairies, from which points of vantage they can easily discover any passing object on the plain at a considerable distance.

We subjoin a few notes on wolves generally, taken from our journals, made during our voyage up the Missouri in 1843.

These animals are extremely abundant on the Missouri river, and in the adjacent country. On our way up that extraordinary stream, we first heard of wolves being troublesome to the farmers who own sheep, calves, young colts, or any other stock on which these ravenous beasts feed, at Jefferson city, the seat of government of the State of Missouri; but to our great surprise, while there not a black wolf was seen.

Wolves are said to feed at times, when very hard pressed by hunger, on certain roots which they dig out of the earth with their forepaws, scratching like a common dog in the ground. When they have killed a Buffalo or other large animal, they drag the remains of the carcass to a concealed spot if at hand, then scrape out the loose soil and bury it, and often lie down on the top of the grave they have thus made for their victim, until urged again by hunger, they exume the body and feast upon it. Along the banks of the river, where occasionally many Buffaloes perish, their weight and bulk preventing them from ascending where the shore is precipitous, wolves are to be seen in considerable numbers feeding upon the drowned Bisons.

Although extremely cunning in hiding themselves, at the report of a gun wolves soon come forth from different quarters, and when the alarm is over, you have only to conceal yourself, and you will soon see them advancing towards you, giving you a fair chance of shooting them, sometimes at not more than thirty yards distance. It is said that although they frequently pursue Buffalo, &c., to the river, they seldom if ever follow them after they take to the water. Their gait and movements are precisely the same as those of the common dog, and their mode of copulating, and the number of young brought forth at a litter is about the same. The diversity of their size and colour is quite remarkable, no two being quite alike.

Some days while ascending the river, we saw from twelve to twenty-five wolves; on one occasion we observed one apparently bent on crossing the river, it swam toward our boat and was fired at, upon which it wheeled round and soon made to the shore from which it had started.

At another time we saw a wolf attempting to climb a very steep and high bank of clay, when, after falling back thrice, it at last reached the top and disappeared at once. On the opposite shore another was seen lying down on a sand bar like a dog, and any one might have supposed it to be one of those attendants on man. Mr. BELL shot at it, but too low, and the fellow scampered off to the margin of the woods, there stopped to take a last lingering look, and then vanished.

In hot weather when wolves go to the river, they usually walk in

up to their sides, and cool themselves while lapping the water, precisely in the manner of a dog. They do not cry out or howl when wounded or when suddenly surprised, but snarl, and snap their jaws together furiously. It is said when suffering for want of food, the strongest will fall upon the young or weak ones, and kill and eat them. Whilst prowling over the prairies (and we had many opportunities of seeing them at such times) they travel slowly, look around them cautiously, and will not disdain even a chance bone that may fall in their way; they bite so voraciously at the bones thus left by the hunter that in many cases their teeth are broken off short, and we have seen a number of specimens in which the jaws showed several teeth to have been fractured in this way.

After a hearty meal, the wolf always lies down when he supposes himself in a place of safety. We were told that occasionally when they had gorged themselves, they slept so soundly that they could be approached and knocked on the head.

The common wolf is not unfrequently met with in company with the Prairie wolf (*Canis latrans*.) On the afternoon of the 13th of July, as Mr. BELL and ourselves were returning to Fort Union, we counted eighteen wolves in one gang, which had been satiating themselves on the carcass of a Buffalo on the river's bank, and were returning to the hills to spend the night. Some of them had their stomachs distended with food and appeared rather lazy.

We were assured at Fort Union that wolves had not been known to attack men or horses in that vicinity, but they will pursue and kill mules and colts even near a trading post, always selecting the fattest. The number of tracks or rather paths made by the wolves from among and around the hills to that station are almost beyond credibility, and it is curious to observe their sagacity in choosing the shortest course and the most favourable ground in travelling.

We saw hybrids, the offspring of the wolf and the cur dog, and also their mixed broods: some of which resemble the wolf, and others the dog. Many of the Assiniboin Indians who visited Fort Union during our stay there, had both wolves and their crosses with the common dog in their trains, and their dog carts (if they may be so called) were drawn alike by both.

The natural gait of the American wolf resembles that of the Newfoundland dog, as it ambles, moving two of its legs on the same side at a time. When there is any appearance of danger, the wolf trots off, and generally makes for unfrequented hilly grounds, and if pursued, gallops at a quick pace, almost equal to that of a good horse, as the

reader will perceive from the following account. On the 16th of July 1843, whilst we were on a Buffalo hunt near the banks of the Yellow Stone river, and all eyes were bent upon the hills and the prairie, which is very broad, we saw a wolf about a quarter of a mile from our encampment, and Mr. OWEN McKENZIE was sent after it. The wolf however ran very swiftly and was not overtaken and shot until it had ran several miles. It dodged about in various directions, and at one time got out of sight behind the hills. This wolf was captured, and a piece of its flesh was boiled for supper; but as we had in the mean time caught about eighteen or twenty Cat-fish, we had an abundant meal and did not judge for ourselves whether the wolf was good eating or not, or if its flesh was like that of the Indian dogs, which we have had several opportunities of tasting.

Wolves are frequently deterred from feeding on animals shot by the hunters on the prairies, who, aware of the cautious and timid character of these rapacious beasts, attach to the game they are obliged to leave behind them a part of their clothing, a handkerchief, &c., or scatter gun powder around the carcass, which the cowardly animals dare not approach although they will watch it for hours at a time, and as soon as the hunter returns and takes out the entrails of the game he had left thus protected, and carries off the pieces he wishes, leaving the coarser parts for the benefit of these hungry animals, they come forward and enjoy the feast. The hunters who occasionally assisted us when we were at Fort Union, related numerous stratagems of this kind to which they had resorted to keep off the wolves when on a hunt.

The wolves of the prairies form burrows, wherein they bring forth their young, and which have more than one entrance; they produce from six to eleven at a birth, of which there are very seldom two alike in colour. The wolf lives to a great age and does not change its colour with increase of years.

GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION.

This variety of wolf is found as far north in the Arctic regions of America as they have been traversed by man. The journals of HEARNE, FRANKLIN, SABINE RICHARDSON, and others, abound with accounts of their presence amid the snows of the polar regions. They exist in the colder parts of Canada, in the Russian possessions on the western coast of America, in Oregon, and along both sides of the Rocky Mountains, to California on the west side and Arkansas on the east. We examined a specimen of the White Wolf killed in Erie county, N. Y., about forty

years ago; on the Atlantic coast they do not appear; although we have seen some specimens of a light grey colour they could not when compared with those of Missouri, be called white wolves.

GENERAL REMARKS

Cold seems necessary to produce the Wolves of white variety. Alpine regions from their altitudes effect the same change. REGNARD informs us that in Lapland, Wolves are almost all of a whitish grey colour—there are some of them white. In Siberia, wolves assume the same colour. The Alps, on the other hand, by their elevation, may be compared to the regions around the Rocky Mountains of America. In both countries wolves become white. We devoted some hours to comparing the large American, European, and Asiatic Wolves, assisted by eminent British Naturalists, in the British Museum and the Museum of the Zoological Society. We found specimens from the Northern and Alpine regions of both continents bore a strong resemblance to each other in form and size, their shades of colour differed only in different specimens from either country, and we finally came to the conclusion that the naturalist who should be able to find distinctive characters to separate the wolves into different species, should have credit for more penetration than we possess.

Audubon, John James and Bachman, John. 1851. "Canis lupus (var. Albus), White American Wolf [Pl. LXXII, male]." *The quadrupeds of North America* 2, 156–162. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.322383>.

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