GENUS CANIS.—LINNÆUS.

DENTAL FORMULA.

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

The three first in the upper jaw, and the four in the lower, trenchant but small, and called also false molars. The great carnivorous tooth above bi-cuspid, with a small tubercle on the inner side, that below with the posterior lobe altogether tubercular, and two tuberculous teeth behind each of the great carnivorous teeth. Muzzle, elongate; tongue, soft; ears, erect, (sometimes pendant in the domestic varieties.) Fore feet, pendactylous; hind feet, tetradactylous. Teats, both inguinal and ventral.

CANIS LUPUS.—LINN.—(VAR. ATER.)

BLACK AMERICAN WOLF.

PLATE LXVII. MALE.

C. niger, magnitudine, formaque C. lupi.

CHARACTERS.

Size and shape of the Common American Wolf; Canis, lupus occidentalis; colour black.

SYNONYMES.

LOUP NOIR DE CANADA, Buffon, vol. ix., p. 364-41.

BLACK WOLF, Long's Expd., vol. i., p. 95.

" Say, Frankl. Jour., vol. i., p. 172.

" Griffith, Anim. King., vol. 2., p. 348.

" Godman, Nat. Hist., vol. i., p. 267.

CANIS LYACON, Harlan's Fauna, p. 82.

VAR. E. LUPUS ATER, Black Amer. Wolf, Richardson, Fauna Boreali Amer., p. 70.

On Stone by W. E. H. H. H. H. H.

Black American Wolf

Traced from Nature by J. W. Audubon

Printed & Published by J. B. Zeller, Phila.

DESCRIPTION.

We regard this animal as a mere variety of the Common American Wolf, to be hereafter described, and need only here observe, that all the Wolves we have examined, such as the *Canis nubilus* of SAY, the White Wolf, the Red Texan Wolf and the Black Wolf, are of the same form, although in size the White Wolf is considerably the largest.

COLOUR.

Face, legs, point of tail and under jaw, black; body, irregularly and transversely barred with blackish brown and greyish; sides of the neck, greyish brown; behind the shoulders, under the belly and on the forehead, greyish brown. Some specimens are darker than others—we have examined several that were perfectly black on the whole surface of the body.

DIMENSIONS.

				Feet.	Inches.
Length of head and body	-	-	-	3	2
Do. of tail vertebræ	-	-	-		11
Do. including fur	-	-	-	1	1
Height of ear	-	-	-		3

HABITS.

Not an individual of the party saw a Black Wolf during our trip up the Missouri, on the prairies near Fort Union, or along the shores of that portion of the Yellow Stone River that we visited. Mr. SAY speaks of its being the most common variety on the banks of the Missouri, but, unfortunately, does not state precisely where.

Wolves of this colour were abundant near Henderson, Kentucky, when we removed to that place, and we saw them frequently during our rambles through the woods after birds.

We found a Black Wolf in one of our wild turkey pens, early one morning. He observed us, as we approached, but instead of making his escape, squatted close down, like a dog which does not wish to be seen. We came up within a few yards of the pen, and shot him dead, through an opening between the logs. This Wolf had killed several fine turkeys, and was in the act of devouring one, which was, doubtless, the reason he did not attempt to make his escape when we approached him.

There is a strong feeling of hostility entertained by the settlers of the

wild portions of the country, toward the Wolf, as his strength, agility, and cunning, (in which last qualification, he is scarcely inferior to his relative, the fox,) tend to render him the most destructive enemy of their pigs, sheep, or young calves, which range in the forest ; therefore, in our country, he is not more mercifully dealt with than in any other part of the world. Traps and snares of various sorts are set for catching him in those districts in which he still abounds. Being more fleet and perhaps better winded than the fox, the Wolf is seldom pursued with hounds or any other dogs in open chase, unless wounded. Although Wolves are bold and savage, few instances occur in our temperate regions of their making an attack on man ; and we have only had one such case come under our own notice. Two young negroes, who resided near the banks of the Ohio, in the lower part of the State of Kentucky, about thirty years ago, had sweethearts living on another plantation, four miles distant. After the labours of the day were over, they frequently visited the fair ladies of their choice, the nearest way to whose dwelling lay directly across a large cane brake. As to the lover every moment is precious, they usually took this route to save time. Winter had set in cold, dark and gloomy, and after sunset scarcely a glimpse of light or glow of warmth were to be found in that dreary swamp, except in the eyes and bosoms of the ardent youths who traversed these gloomy solitudes. One night, they set forth over a thin crust of snow. Prudent, to a certain degree, the lovers carried their axes on their shoulders, and walked as briskly as the narrow path would allow. Some transient glimpses of light now and then met their eyes in the more open spaces between the trees, or when the heavy drifting clouds parting at times allowed a star to peep forth on the desolate scene. Fearfully, a long and frightful howl burst upon them, and they were instantly aware that it proceeded from a troop of hungry and perhaps desperate wolves. They paused for a moment and a dismal silence succeeded. All was dark, save a few feet of the snow-covered ground immediately in front of them. They resumed their pace hastily, with their axes in their hands prepared for an attack. Suddenly, the foremost man was assailed by several wolves which seized on him, and inflicted terrible wounds with their fangs on his legs and arms, and as they were followed by many others as ravenous as themselves, several sprung at the breast of his companion, and dragged him to the ground. Both struggled manfully against their foes, but in a short time one of the negroes had ceased to move ; and the other, reduced in strength and perhaps despairing of aiding his unfortunate comrade or even saving his own life, threw down his axe, sprang on to the branch of a tree, and speedily gained a place of safety amid the boughs. Here he passed a miserable night, and the next morn-

ing the bones of his friend lay scattered around on the snow, which was stained with his blood. Three dead wolves lay near, but the rest of the pack had disappeared ; and Scipio sliding to the ground, recovered the axes and returned home to relate the terrible catastrophe.

About two years after this occurrence, as we were travelling between Henderson and Vincennes, we chanced to stop for the night at the house of a farmer, (for in those days hotels were scarce in that part of the good State of Indiana.) After putting up our horses and refreshing ourself, we entered into conversation with our worthy host, and were invited by him to visit the wolf pits which he had constructed about half a mile from the house. Glad of the opportunity, we accompanied him across the fields to the skirts of the adjoining forest, where he had three pits within a few hundred yards of each other. They were about eight feet deep, broadest at the bottom, so as to render it impossible for the most active animal to escape from them. The mouth of each pit was covered with a revolving platform of boughs and twigs, interlaced together and attached to a cross piece of timber, which served for an axle. On this light sort of platform, which was balanced by a heavy stick of wood fastened to the under side, a large piece of putrid venison was tied for bait. After examining all the pits, we returned to the house, our companion remarking that he was in the habit of visiting his pits daily, in order to see that all was right ; that the wolves had been very bad that season ; had destroyed nearly all his sheep, and had killed one of his colts. "But," added he, "I am now paying them off in full, and if I have any luck, you will see some fun in the morning." With this expectation we retired to rest, and were up at day-light. "I think," said our host, "that all is right ; for I see the dogs are anxious to get away to the pits, and although they are nothing but curs, their noses are pretty keen for wolves." As he took up his gun and axe and a large knife, the dogs began to howl and bark, and whisked around us as if full of delight. When we reached the first pit, we found the bait had been disturbed and the platform was somewhat injured, but the animal was not in the pit. On examining the second pit, we discovered three famous fellows safe enough in it, two black and one brindled, all of good size. They were lying flat on the earth, with their ears close down to their heads, their eyes indicating fear more than anger. To our astonishment, the farmer proposed descending into the pit to hamstring them, in order to haul them up, and then allow them to be killed by the dogs, which, he said, would sharpen his curs for an encounter with the wolves, should any come near his house in future. Being novices in this kind of business, we begged to be lookers on. "With all my heart," cried the farmer, "stand here, and look at me," whereupon he glided down, on a knobbed pole, taking his axe and knife with him,

and leaving his rifle to our care. We were not a little surprised at the cowardice of the wolves. The woodman stretched out their hind legs, in succession, and with a stroke of the knife cut the principal tendon above the joint, exhibiting as little fear, as if he had been marking lambs. As soon as he had thus disabled the wolves, he got out, but had to return to the house for a rope, which he had not thought of. He returned quickly, and, whilst I secured the platform in a perpendicular position on its axis, he made a slip knot at one end of the rope, and threw it over the head of one of the wolves. We now hauled the terrified animal up; and motionless with fright, half choked, and disabled in its hind legs, the farmer slipped the rope from its neck, and left it to the mercy of the dogs, who set upon it with great fury and worried it to death. The second was dealt with in the same manner; but the third, which was probably oldest, showed some spirit the moment the dogs were set upon it, and scuffled along on its forelegs, at a surprising rate, snapping all the while furiously at the dogs, several of which it bit severely; and so well did the desperate animal defend itself, that the farmer, apprehensive of its killing some of his pack, ran up and knocked it on the head with his axe. This wolf was a female, and was blacker than the other dark-coloured one.

Once, when we were travelling on foot not far from the southern boundary of Kentucky, we fell in with a Black Wolf, following a man with a rifle on his shoulders. On speaking with him about this animal, he assured us that it was as tame and as gentle as any dog, and that he had never met with a dog that could trail a deer better. We were so much struck with this account and the noble appearance of the wolf, that we offered him one hundred dollars for it; but the owner would not part with it for any price.

Our plate was drawn from a fine specimen, although not so black a one as we have seen. We consider the Dusky Wolf and the Black Wolf as identically the same.

As we shall have occasion to refer to the characteristics of Wolves generally again, we shall not prolong this article; the Black, as already stated, being, in fact, only a variety. In our account of the Common Gray Wolf of the North, and the White Wolf of the Prairies, which last is very common, we shall give farther and more specific details of their breeding and other matters.

GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION

All packs of American Wolves usually consist of various shades of colour and varieties, nearly black, have occasionally been found in every part of the United States. The varieties, with more or less of black, continue to increase as we proceed farther to the south, and in Florida the prevailing colour

of the wolves is black. We have seen two or three skins procured in N. Carolina. There is a specimen in the Museum of the Philosophical Society of Charleston, obtained at Goose Creek, a few years ago, that is several shades darker than the specimen from which our drawing was made; and in a gang of seventeen wolves, which existed in Colleton District, S. C., a few years ago, (sixteen of which were killed by the hunters in eighteen months), we were informed that about one fifth were black and the others of every shade of colour—from black to dusky grey and yellowish white. We have heard of this variety in the southern part of Missouri, Louisiana, and the northern parts of Texas.

Audubon, John James and Bachman, John. 1851. "Canis lupus (var. Ater.), Black American Wolf [Pl. LXVII, male]." *The quadrupeds of North America* 2, 126–131. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.322384>.

View This Item Online: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/108514>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.322384>

Permalink: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/partpdf/322384>

Holding Institution

Duke University Libraries (archive.org)

Sponsored by

Duke University Libraries

Copyright & Reuse

Copyright Status: Not provided. Contact Holding Institution to verify copyright status.

This document was created from content at the **Biodiversity Heritage Library**, the world's largest open access digital library for biodiversity literature and archives. Visit BHL at <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org>.