Northern Hare - (Old & Young)

Summer pelage.

Drawn from Nature by J. J. Audubon F.R.S.F.L.S.

Drawn on Stone by R. Tembly

Printed by Nagel & Weingartner N.Y.

LEPUS AMERICANUS.—ERXLEBEN.

NORTHERN HARE.

PLATE XI.—Fig. 1, MALE; Fig. 2, YOUNG FEMALE. Summer Pelage.

PLATE XII.—Winter Pelage.

L. hyeme albus; pilis tricoloribus, apice albis, ad radices cœruleis, medio fulvis; æstate, supra rufo-fuscus, infra albus, auribus capite paullo brevioribus; L. Sylvatica paullo robustior. L. Glacialis minor.

CHARACTERS.

Size, larger than the gray rabbit (Lepus Sylvaticus), less than the Polar hare; (L. Glacialis). Colour in summer, reddish-brown above, white beneath; in winter, white; roots of the hairs, blue; nearer the surface, fawn-colour, and the tips, white; ears, a little shorter than the head.

SYNONYMES.

LIEVRE (Quenton Malisia), Sagard Theodat, Canada, p. 747. 1636.

SWEDISH HARE, Kalm's Travels in North America, vol. ii., p. 45. 1749.

AMERICAN HARE, Philos. Trans., London, vol. lxii., pp. 11, 376. 1772.

LEPUS AMERICANUS, Erxleben, Syst. regni Animalis, p. 330. 1777.

“ NANUS, Schreber, vol. ii., p. 881, pl. 234, fig.

“ HUDSONIUS, Pallas, Glires, pp. 1, 30.

VARYING HARE, Pennant, Arct. Zool., vol. i., p. 95.

LEPUS VIRGINIANUS, Harlan, Fauna, p. 196. 1825.

“ VARIABILIS, var. Godman, Nat. Hist., vol. ii., p. 164.

AMERICAN VARYING HARE, Doughty, Cabinet Nat. Hist., vol. i., p. 217, pl. 19, Autumn pelage.

THE NORTHERN HARE, Audubon, Ornithological Biog., vol. ii., p. 469. Birds of America, pl. 181 (in the talons of the Golden Eagle), Winter pelage.

LEPUS AMERICANUS, Richardson, Fauna Boreali A., p. 217.

“ VIRGINIANUS, Bach, Acad. Nat. Sciences, Philadelphia, vol. vii., p. 301.

“ AMERICANUS, Bach, Ib., p. 403, and Ib., vol. viii., p. 76.

“ AMERICANUS, Dekay, Nat. Hist. State of New-York, p. 95, pl. 26.

DESCRIPTION.

Incisors, pure white, shorter and smaller than in *L. Glacialis*; upper ones moderately grooved; the two posterior upper incisors very small. The

margins of the orbits project considerably, having a distinct depression in the frontal bone; this is more conspicuous in the old than in the younger animals. Head rather short; nose blunt, eyes large and prominent; ears placed far back, and near each other; whiskers, long and numerous; body, elongated, thickly clothed with long loose hair, with a soft downy fur beneath; legs, long; hind-legs, nearly twice the length of the fore-legs; feet, thickly clothed with hair, completely concealing the nails, which are long, thin, very sharp, and slightly arched. So thickly are the soles covered with hair, that an impression by the nails is not generally visible in their tracks made while passing over the snow, unless when running very fast. Tail, very short, covered with fur, but not very bushy. The form of this species is on the whole not very elegant; its long hind legs, although remarkably well adapted for rapid locomotion, and its diminutive tail, would lead the spectator at first sight to pronounce it an awkward animal; which is, nevertheless, far from being the fact. Its fur never lies smooth and compact, either in winter or summer, as does that of many other species, but seems to hang loosely on its back and sides, giving it a somewhat shaggy appearance. The hair on the body is in summer about an inch and a half long, and in winter a little longer.

COLOUR.

In summer, the whole of the upper surface is reddish-brown, formed by hairs that are at their roots and for two-thirds of their length of a blueish ash colour, then reddish-yellow, succeeded by a narrow line of dark-brown, the part next the tips or points, reddish-brown, but nearly all the hairs tipped with black—this colour predominating toward the rump. Whiskers, mostly black, a few white, the longest reaching beyond the head; ears, brown, with a narrow black border on the outer margin, and a slight fringe of white hairs on the inner. In some specimens there is a fawn, and in others a light-coloured, edge around the eyes, and a few white hairs on the forehead. The pupil of the eye is dark, the iris light silvery-yellow; point of nose, chin, and under the throat, white; neck, yellowish-brown. Inner surface of legs, and under surface of body, white; between the hind-legs, to the insertion of the tail, white; upper surface of the tail, brown, under surface white. The summer dress of this species is assumed in April, and remains without much change till about the beginning of November in the latitude of Quebec, and till the middle of the same month in the State of New-York and the western parts of Pennsylvania; after which season the animal gains its winter pelage. During winter, in high Northern latitudes, it becomes nearly pure white, with the

Northern Hare

Winter pelage.

Drawn from Nature by J. J. Audubon F.R.S., F.L.S.

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Colored by J. Lawrence

exception of the black edge on the outer borders of the ears. In the latitude of Albany, New-York, it has always a tinge of reddish-brown, more conspicuous in some specimens than in others, giving it a wavy appearance, especially when the animal is running, or when the fur is in the least agitated. In the winter season the hair is plumbeous at base, then reddish, and is broadly tipped with white. The parts of the body which are the last to assume the white change, are the forehead and shoulders; we have two winter-killed specimens before us that have the forehead, and a patch on the shoulders, brown. On the under surface, the fur in most specimens is white, even to the roots. A few long black hairs arise above and beneath the eyes, and extend backwards. The soles have a yellowish soiled appearance.

We possess a specimen of the young, about half grown, which in its general aspect resembles the adult; the colour of the back, however, is a shade darker, and the under surface an ashy white. The black edge is very conspicuous on the outer rim of the ear, and some of the whiskers are of unusual length, reaching beyond the head to the middle of the ear. The tail is very short, black above, and grayish-white beneath. The young become white in the autumn of the first year, but assume their winter colouring a little later in the season than the adults. We have met with some specimens in the New-York markets, late in January, in which the change of colour was very partial, the summer pelage still predominating.

DIMENSIONS.

The size and weight of the Northern hare we have found to vary very much. The measurements hitherto given were generally taken from stuffed specimens, which afford no very accurate indications of the size of the animal when living, or when recently killed. Dr. GODMAN, on the authority of Prince CHARLES LUCIEN BONAPARTE, gives the measurement of a recent specimen as thirty-one inches, and Dr. HARLAN's measurement of the same specimen after it had been stuffed was sixteen inches. We think it probable that the Prince and the Doctor adopted different modes of measuring. All stuffed specimens shrink very much; of a dozen now in our collection, there is not one that measures more than eighteen inches from point of nose to root of tail, and several white adults measure but fifteen inches.

The following measurements are from the largest specimen we have procured, taken when the animal was recently killed.

DIMENSIONS.

From point of nose to root of tail	-	-	-	19 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches.
Tail (vertebræ)	-	-	-	1 $\frac{1}{4}$ do.
Do. to end of hair	-	-	-	2 $\frac{1}{4}$ do.
From heel to end of middle claw	-	-	-	5 $\frac{1}{2}$ do.
Height of ear	-	-	-	3 $\frac{1}{2}$ do.

Another specimen of moderate size.

From point of nose to root of tail	-	-	-	16 do.
Tail (vertebræ)	-	-	-	1 $\frac{1}{2}$ do.
Do. to end of hair	-	-	-	2 $\frac{1}{2}$ do.
From heel to end of middle claw	-	-	-	5 $\frac{1}{4}$ do.
Height of ear	-	-	-	3 $\frac{1}{2}$ do.

Weight:—This species in the beginning of winter varies from three to six and a half pounds, but we consider 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ pounds to be the average weight of a full-grown animal in good condition.

HABITS.

Our different species of Hares, and more especially the present one and the little gray rabbit, have been so much mixed up in the accounts of authors, that great confusion exists in regard to their habits, and their specific identity. The assertion of WARDEN, that the American Hare retreats into hollow trees when pursued, applies to the gray rabbit, for which it was no doubt intended, but not to the Northern Hare. We are not aware that the latter ever takes shelter either in a hole in the earth, or in a hollow tree. We have seen it chased by hounds for whole days, and have witnessed the repetition of these hunts for several successive winters, without ever knowing it to seek concealment or security in such places. It depends on its long legs, and on the thickness of the woods, to aid it in evading the pursuit of its enemies. When hunted, it winds and doubles among thick clusters of young pines and scrub-oaks, or leads the dogs through entangled patches of hemlock and spruce fir, until it sometimes wearies out its pursuers; and unless the hunter should appear, and stop its career with the gun, it is almost certain to escape.

In deep snows, the animal is so light, and is so well supported by its broad furry-feet, that it passes over the surface making only a faint impression, whilst the hounds plunge deep into the snow at every bound, and soon give up the hopeless pursuit. It avoids not only open grounds, but even open woods, and confines itself to the densest and most impenetrable forests. Although it wanders by night in many direc-

tions in search of its appropriate food, we have scarcely ever seen its tracks in the open fields; it seems cautiously to avoid the cabbage and turnip fields of the farmer, and seldom even in the most retired places makes an encroachment on his cultivated grounds.

The food of this species in summer consists of various kinds of juicy and tender grasses, and the bark, leaves, and buds, of several small shrubs; and these Hares seem to be particularly fond of the young twigs of the wild allspice (*Laurus benzoin*), but in winter, when the earth is covered with snow, they gain a precarious subsistence from the buds and bark of such trees as are suited to their taste. Sometimes they scratch up the snow to feed on the leaves and berries of the various species of *Pyrola*, found in the Northern States. The bark of the willow, birch and poplar, and the buds of young pines, are sought after by them with avidity. We have seen persons in the Northern part of the State of New-York, who were desirous of shooting these animals by moonlight, watching near American black-poplar trees (*Populus Hudsonica*), which they had cut down for the purpose of attracting them to feed on their buds and tender twigs, in which they were often successful. Some of these Hares which we had in a domesticated state, were fed on cabbage leaves, turnips, parsnips, potatoes and sweet apples. During one very cold winter, when these could not be conveniently obtained, they were frequently supplied with clover-hay, to which, when more agreeable food was not given them, they did not evince any aversion; from time to time also, outer branches of willow, poplar or apple trees, were thrown into their enclosure, the bark of which seemed to be greatly relished by them.

The Northern Hare, like most others of the genus, seeks its food only by night or in the early part of the evening. To this habit it is more exclusively confined during autumn and winter, than in spring and summer. In the latter seasons, especially in spring, these animals are frequently observed in the morning, and as the sun is declining, in the afternoon, cautiously proceeding along some solitary by-path of the forest. Two or three may often be seen associated together, appearing full of activity and playfulness. When disturbed on these occasions, they stamp on the ground, making a noise so loud that it can be heard at some distance, then hopping a few yards into the thicket, they sit with ears erect, seemingly listening, to ascertain whether they are pursued or not. This habit of thumping on the earth is common to most hares and rabbits. We have particularly noticed it in the domesticated rabbit (*L. cuniculus*), and in our common gray rabbit. They are more particularly in the habit of doing it on moonlight nights; it is indicative either of fear or anger, and is a frequent action among the males when they meet in combat. During cold weather

this Hare retires to its form at early dawn, or shelters itself under the thick foliage of fallen tree tops, particularly those of the pine and hemlock. It occasionally retires to the same cover for a number of nights in succession, but this habit is by no means common; and the sportsman who expects on some succeeding day to find this animal in the place from which it was once started, is likely to be disappointed; although we are not aware, that any other of our species of hare are so attached to particular and beaten paths through the woods, as the one now under consideration. It nightly pursues these paths, not only during the deep snows of winter, but for a period of several years, if not killed or taken, wandering through them even during summer. We have seen a dozen caught at one spot in snares composed of horse-hair or brass wire, in the course of a winter, and when the snow had disappeared and the spring was advanced, others were still captured in the same way, and in the same paths.

The period of gestation in this species is believed to be, (although we cannot speak with positive certainty,) about six weeks. Two females which we domesticated, and kept in a warren, produced young, one on the tenth and the other on the fifteenth of May; one had four, and the other six leverets, which were deposited on a nest of straw the inside of which was lined with a considerable quantity of hair plucked from their bodies. They succeeded in rearing all their young but one, which was killed by the male of a common European rabbit. They were not again gravid during that season. Ill health, and more important studies, required us to be absent for six months, and when we returned, all our pets had escaped to the woods, therefore we could not satisfactorily finish the observations on their habits in confinement, which had interested and amused us in many a leisure hour.

We, however, think it probable that the females in their wild state may produce young twice during the season. Those referred to above were much harassed by other species which were confined in the same warren, and might therefore have been less prolific than if they had enjoyed their liberty undisturbed, amid the recesses of their native woods. We have frequently observed the young of the Northern Hare in May, and again in July. These last must have been either from a second litter, or the produce of a young female of the previous year. The young, at birth, were able to see. They were covered with short hair, and appeared somewhat darker in colour than the adults, at that season. They left their nest in ten or twelve days, and from that time seemed to provide for themselves, and to derive little sustenance or protection from their mothers. The old males at this period seemed to be animated with renewed

courage; they had previously suffered themselves to be chased and worried by the common English rabbit, and even retreated from the attacks of the gray rabbit; but they now stood their ground, and engaged in fierce combats with the other prisoners confined with them, and generally came off victorious. They stamped with their feet, used their teeth and claws to a fearful purpose, and in the fight tore off patches of skin and mutilated the ears of their former persecutors, till they were left in undisturbed possession of the premises!

The males did not evince the vicious propensity to destroy their young which is observed in the domesticated English rabbit; on the contrary, they would frequently sit beside their little family, when they were but a day or two old, seeming to enjoy their playfulness and to watch their progress to maturity.

The Northern Hare seems during summer to prefer dry and elevated situations, and to be more fond of grounds covered with pines and firs, than of those that are overgrown with oak or hickory. The swamps and marshes soil their feet, and after having been compelled to pass through them, they are for hours employed in rubbing and drying their paws. In winter, however, when such places are hardened by the frost, they not only have paths through them in every direction, but occasionally seek a fallen tree-top as a hiding or resting place, in the centre of a swamp. We have observed them in great numbers in an almost impenetrable thicket of black larch, or hackmatack, (*Larix pendula*), considerable portions of which were during summer a perfect morass. In what are called the "bark clearings," places where hemlock trees have been cut down to procure tan bark, this species is sometimes so abundant that twenty or thirty of them may be started in a day's walk.

As an article of food, this is the most indifferent of all our species of Hares; its flesh is hard, dry, almost juiceless, possessing none of the flavour of the English hare, and much inferior to that of our gray rabbit. Epicures, however, who often regard as dainties dishes that are scarce, and who, by the skilful application of the culinary art possess means of rendering things savoury that are of themselves insipid, may dispute this point with us.

The Northern Hare, as is proverbially the case with all the species, has many enemies. It is pursued by men and dogs, by carnivorous beasts of the forest, by eagles, by hawks, and by owls. In the northern parts of Maine, in Canada, and in the countries farther north, their most formidable enemies are the Canada lynx, (*Lynx Canadensis*.) the jer falcon, (*Falco Islandicus*.) and the snowy owl, (*Surnea nyctea*.) In the New England States, however, and in New-York, the red-tailed hawk, (*Buteo*

Borealis.) is occasionally seen with one of these species in its talons. But its most formidable enemy is the great horned owl, (*Bubo Virginianus*.) We have also, on one occasion, observed a common house-cat dragging a full grown Northern Hare from the woods, to feed her young. Lads on their way to school, entrap them with snares attached to a bent twig, placed along the paths they nightly resort to. The hunter finds recreation in pursuing them with hounds, whilst he places himself in some wood-path where they were last seen to pass. The Hare runs from fifty to a hundred yards ahead of the dogs, and in its windings and turnings to escape from them frequently returns to the spot where the hunter is stationed, and falls by a shot from his gun.

The Northern Hare, when rapidly pursued, makes such great efforts to escape, that the poor creature (as we have said already) is occasionally successful, and fairly outruns the hounds, whilst the hunter is cunningly avoided by it when doubling. After one of these hard chases, however, we have known the animal die from the fatigue it had undergone, or from having been overheated. We once saw one, which had been closely pressed by the dogs nearly all the afternoon, return to a thicket after the hounds had been called off and the sportsmen had given up the vain pursuit. Next morning we examined the place to which it had retired, and to our surprise, discovered the hare sitting in its form, under a dwarfish, crooked, pine-bush; it was covered with snow and quite dead. In this instance the hare had no doubt been greatly overheated by the race of the preceding day, as well as exhausted and terrified; and the poor thing being in that condition very susceptible of cold was probably chilled by the night air and the falling snow, until its palpitating heart, gradually impelling the vital fluid with fainter and slower pulsations, at length ceased its throbbings forever.

Sometimes we have found these Hares dead in the woods after the melting of the snow in the Spring, and on examination we found they were entangled in portions of wire snares, frequently entwined round their necks, from which they had been unable to extricate themselves.

This species when caught alive cannot be taken into the hand like the gray rabbit, with impunity; the latter, when seized by the ears or hind-legs soon becomes quiet and is harmless; but the Northern Hare struggles to escape, and makes a formidable resistance with its teeth and nails. On one occasion a servant who was expert at catching the gray rabbit in traps, came to us with a rueful countenance holding a hare in his hands, exhibiting at the same time sundry severe scratches he had received, showing us his torn clothes, and a place on his leg which the animal had bitten, and declaring that he had caught "a rabbit as cross as a

cat." We ascertained it to be a Northern Hare in its summer dress, and although its captor had not been able to distinguish it from the gray rabbit by its colour, he certainly received a practical lesson in natural history which he did not soon forget.

A living individual of this species, which we have in Charleston in a partially domesticated state, for the purpose of trying to ascertain the effect of a warm climate on its changes of colour, is particularly cross when approached by a stranger. It raises its fur, and springs at the intruder with almost a growl, and is ready with its claws and teeth to gratify its rage, and inflict a wound on the person who has aroused its ire. When thus excited, it reminded us by its attitudes of an angry racoon.

The skin of the Northern Hare is so tender and easily torn, and the fur is so apt to be spoiled and drop off on being handled, that it is difficult to prepare perfect specimens for the naturalist's cabinet. The pelt is not in much request among the furriers, and is regarded by the latter as of little value. The hind-feet, however, are used by the latter in a part of the process by which the soft, glossy, surface is imparted to his fabric, and answer the purpose of a soft hat-brush.

GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION.

This species is found in portions of the British possessions, as far as the sixty-eighth parallel of North latitude. It is, however, confined to the Eastern portion of our Continent; RICHARDSON, who represents it as "a common animal from one extremity of the Continent to the other," seems to have mistaken for it another species which replaces it on the North West coast. Although it does not range as far to the North as the Polar hare, it is decidedly a Northern species; it is found at Hudson's Bay, in Newfoundland, Canada, all the New-England States, and in the Northern portions of New-York, Pennsylvania, and Ohio. Mr. DOUGHTY informed us that he procured a specimen on the Alleghany Mountains in the Northern part of Virginia, Lat. $40^{\circ} 29'$, where it had never before been observed by the inhabitants. On seeking for it afterwards in the locality from which he obtained it, we were unsuccessful, and we are inclined to believe that it is only occasionally that some straggler wanders so far South among these mountains, and that its Southern limit may be set down at about 40° .

GENERAL REMARKS.

The history of this Hare has been attempted from time to time, by early and recent travellers and naturalists, and most of their accounts of

it are only sources of perplexity, and additional difficulties in the way of the naturalist of the present day. Strange mistakes were committed by some of those who wrote on the subject, from PENNANT down to HARLAN, GODMAN, and others still later; and one error appears to have led to another, until even the identity of the species meant to be described by different authors, was finally involved in an almost inextricable web of embarrassment.

As far as we have been able to ascertain, the Northern Hare was first noticed by SAGARD THEODAT, (Hist. de Canada,) in 1636. KALM, (who travelled in America from 1748 to 1751, and whose work was published in the Swedish language, and soon after translated into German and English,) speaks of this species as follows:—"Hares are likewise said to be plentiful even in Hudson's Bay, and they are abundant in Canada, where I have often seen, and found them perfectly corresponding with our Swedish hares. In summer they have a brownish-gray, and in winter a snowy-white colour, as with us." (KALM's Travels, &c., vol. ii., p. 45. English translation.)

This judicious and intelligent traveller, undoubtedly here referred to the Northern Hare. He supposed it to be identical with the Alpine or variable Hare, (*Lepus variabilis*,) which is found in Sweden and other Northern countries of Europe. That species is a little larger than the Northern Hare, and the tips of its ears are black; but although it is a distinct species, it so nearly resembles the latter, that several authors, GODMAN not excepted, were induced to regard these two species as identical. KALM, (see vol. i., p. 105, Eng. trans.,) whilst he was in the vicinity of Philadelphia, where the Northern Hare never existed, gave a correct account of another species, the American gray rabbit, which we will notice more in detail when we describe that animal. It is very evident that in these two notices of American hares, KALM had reference to two distinct species, and that he pointed out those distinctive marks by which they are separated. If subsequent authors confounded the two species, and created confusion, their errors evidently cannot be owing to any fault of the eminent Swedish traveller.

The first specimens of the Northern Hare that appeared in Europe, were sent by the servants of the Hudson's Bay Company to England in 1771, (see Phil. Trans., vol. lxii., p. 13.) There were four specimens in the collection, exhibiting the various gradations of colour. In addition to these, a living animal of the same species was received about the same time, probably by the same ship. It was brought to the notice of the Philosophical Society, in a letter from the Hon. DAINES BARRINGTON, read 16th January, 1772. This letter is interesting, since it gives us some idea

of the state of natural science in England, at that early day. The animal had for some time remained alive, but had died in the previous November. It had at that time already changed its summer colour, and become nearly white. It was *boiled*, in order to ascertain whether it was a hare or a rabbit, as according to RAY, if the flesh was brown it was a hare, if white a rabbit. It proved to be brown, and was declared to be a hare. The test was strange enough, but the conclusion was correct. In May of the same year, J. R. FORSTER, Esq., F. R. S., described this, among twenty quadrupeds, that had been sent from Hudson's Bay. After giving an account of the manner in which it was captured by snares made of brass wire and pack thread, he designates its size as "bigger than the rabbit, but less than the Alpine hare." In this he was quite correct. He then goes on to show that its hind-feet are longer in proportion to the body than those of the rabbit and common hare, &c. He finally speaks of its habits, and here his first error occurs. KALM's accounts of *two* different species were supposed by him to refer to one species only, and whilst the Northern Hare was *described*—some of the *habits* of the American gray rabbit were incorrectly referred to it.

As, however, FORSTER gave it no specific name and his description on the whole was but a loose one, it was left to another naturalist to give it a scientific appellation.

In 1777, ERXLEBEN gave the first scientific description of it, and named it *Lepus Americanus*. SCHREBER, (as we are prepared to show in our article on *Lepus sylvaticus*,) published an account of it immediately afterwards, under the name of *Lepus nanus*.

This description, as may easily be seen, was principally taken from FORSTER. SCHÖEFFER about the same period, and PALLAS in 1778, under the name of *L. Hudsonicus*, and PENNANT in 1780, under that of *American hare*, followed each other in quick succession.

In GMELIN's LINNÆUS, (1788,) it is very imperfectly described in one single line. All these authors copied the error of FORSTER in giving to the Northern Hare the habits of the American gray rabbit.

In the work of DESMAREST, (*Mammalogie, ou description des espèces de Mammifères*, p. 351, Paris, 1820,) a description is given of "Esp. Lièvre d'Amérique, *Lepus Americanus*." This, however, instead of being a description of the true *L. Americanus* of all previous authors, is in most particulars a pretty good description of our gray rabbit. HARLAN, who published his *Fauna* in 1825, translated and published this description very literally, even to its faults, (see *Fauna Americana*, p. 196.) Having thus erroneously disposed of the gray rabbit under the name of *L. Americanus*, the true *Lepus Americanus* was named by him *L. Virginianus*! The

following year, Dr. GODMAN gave a description of the Northern Hare, referring it to the *Lepus variabilis* of Europe!

After Dr. RICHARDSON'S return from his perilous journey through the Polar regions, he prepared in England his valuable *Fauna Boreali Americana*, which was published in 1829. Specimens labelled *L. Americanus* of ERXLEBEN, were still in the British Museum, and he published descriptions of his own specimens under that name. The gray rabbit did not come within the range of his investigations, but having received a hunter's skin from the vicinity of the Columbia river, he supposed it to be the *L. Virginianus* of HARLAN, and described it under that name. This skin, however, has since proved to belong to a different species; the Northern Hare not being found in the regions bordering that river.

In 1837, having several new species of Hare to describe, we began to look into this subject, and endeavoured to correct the errors in regard to the species, that had crept into the works of various authors.

We had not seen ERXLEBEN'S work, and supposing that the species were correctly designated, we published our views of the habits, &c., of the two species, (whose identity and proper cognomen we have, we hope, just established,) under the old names of *L. Virginianus* and *L. Americanus*, (see Jour. of Acad. of Nat. Sciences of Phila., vol. vii., pl. 2. p. 282.) The article had scarcely been printed, before we obtained a copy of ERXLEBEN, and we immediately perceived and corrected the errors that had been committed, giving the Northern Hare its correct name, *L. Americanus*, and bestowing on the gray rabbit, which, through the mistakes we have already described had been left without any name, that of *Lepus sylvaticus*, (Jour. Acad. Nat. Sciences of Phil., vol. vii., p. 403.) The reasons for this arrangement were given in our remarks on the genus LEPUS, in a subsequent paper, (Jour. Acad. Sc., vol. viii., pl. 1, p. 75,) where we characterized a number of additional new species. In 1842, Dr. DEKAY, (see Nat. Hist. of New-York, p. 95,) acceding to this arrangement of the Northern Hare under the specific name of *L. Americanus*, remarks, "This Hare was first vaguely indicated by ERXLEBEN in 1777." In a spirit of great fairness, however, that author's original description was published at the foot of the article.

In order to set this matter at rest, remove this species from the false position in which it has so long stood, and give its first describer the credit to which he is entitled, we will here insert the description above alluded to.

"*Lepus Americanus*, *L. cauda abbreviata*; *pedibus posticis corpore dimidio longioribus*; *auricularum caudoque apicibus griseis*.

"Die Hasen—KALM, Hudson's Bay Quadrap., BARRINGTON, Phil. Trans.

vol. lxii., p. 376. Magnitudine medius inter *L. cuniculum* et *timidum* Alpinum, (sc. *L. timidus*, FORSTER, Phil. Trans. vol. lxii., p. 375.) Auriculæ et caudæ apices perpetuo grisei—Pedes postici longiores quam in *L. timido* et *cuniculo*, color griseo-fuscus; Hieme in frigidioribus albus.

“Habitat in America boreali ad fretum Hudsoni copiosissimus, nocturnus. Non fœdit, degit sub arborum radicibus, inque cavis arboribus. Parit bis vel semel in anno; pullos quinque ad septem; caro bona, colore *L. timidi*.”

In great deference, we would submit whether the above is not more than a “*vague indication*” of a species. To us it appears a tolerably full description for the era in which the author lived and considering the few species of Hare then known.

There were at that early period but three Hares with which naturalists were familiar:—*L. timidus*, the common European Hare; *L. variabilis*, the variable Hare; and *L. cuniculus*, the European burrowing rabbit. With these ERXLEBEN compares this species in size and colour. With the exception of one of the habits he mentions, this description appears to us creditable to him. There have been many occasions, when, perplexed in guessing at the species intended to be described by old authors, (the Father of natural history, LINNÆUS himself, not excepted,) we would have hailed a description like this, as a light in darkness. The species ERXLEBEN had in view cannot be mistaken; he describes it very correctly as “*magnitudine medius inter L. cuniculum et timidum Alpinum*.” Our American gray rabbit, instead of being intermediate between *L. cuniculus* and the Alpine hare, is smaller than either. “*Pedes postici longiores quam in L. timido et cuniculo*.” The long hind-feet are distinctive marks of the Northern Hare; but those of our gray rabbit are much shorter than those of *L. timidus*, or common hare of Europe. “*Hieme in frigidioribus albus*.” Our gray rabbit, contrary to the assertion of most authors, does not become white in winter in any latitude. “*Habitat in America boreali ad fretum Hudsoni copiosissimus*.” Dr. RICHARDSON, and every Northern traveller with whom we have conversed, have assured us that our gray rabbit does not exist at Hudson’s Bay, where the Northern Hare is quite abundant, and where that and the Polar hare, (the last named species existing still further North,) are the only species to be found. We have examined and compared the original specimen described by Dr. RICHARDSON, and also those in the British Museum that have successively replaced the specimens first sent to England, and find that they all belong to this species. In fact our gray rabbit is very little known in England or Scotland; since, after an examination of all the principal Museums in those countries, we met

with but two specimens, one of which was not named, and the other was not improperly labelled, "*Lepus Americanus* Harlan, non Erxleben."

The rigid rule of priority will always preserve for the Northern Hare the name of *L. Americanus*, whilst *L. nanus*, *L. Hudsonicus*, and *L. Virginianus*, must be set down merely as synonymes.

Audubon, John James and Bachman, John. 1851. "Lepus Americanus, Northern Hare [Pl. XI, male and young female summer pelage]." *The quadrupeds of North America* 1, 93–106. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.322463>.

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