



Drawn on Stone by R. Trembly

Swamp Rabbit.
Male.

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

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

LEPUS AQUATICUS.—BACH.

SWAMP-HARE.

PLATE XXXVII.—MALE.

L. L. Americani magnitudine ; capite, auribus, caudaque longis ; pedibus longis minus pilosis quam in L. sylvatico ; supra fuscus ; subtus albus.

CHARACTERS.

Size of the Northern hare ; head, ears, and tail, long ; feet, long, less covered with hair than those of the gray rabbit ; general colour, dark grayish-brown above, white beneath.

SYNONYMES.

LEPUS AQUATICUS, Bach., Journal Acad. Nat. Sc., Philad., vol. vii., p. 2, p. 319, read March 21, 1837.

LEPUS DOUGLASSII, var. 1, Gray, Magazine Nat. Hist., London, November, 1837.

DESCRIPTION.

The body of this species is large, and formed both for strength and speed ; the hairs do not hang as loosely on the surface as those of the Northern hare, but lie smooth and compact ; the fur is coarser and more glossy than that of the gray rabbit.

Head, long, and moderately arched ; skull, considerably larger than that of the Northern hare, (*L. Americanus*), with a larger orbital cavity. The margins of the orbits project so as to produce a visible depression in the anterior part of the frontal bone ; whiskers, half the length of the head ; ears, long, shaped like those of the marsh-hare, clothed externally with a dense coat of very short hairs ; internally, they are partially covered along the margins, but nearer the orifice are nearly naked.

The feet bear no resemblance to those of the Northern hare or those of the gray rabbit. Instead of being clothed, as in those species, with a compact mass of hair, they are formed like those of the marsh-hare ; the toes, when spread, leaving distinct impressions on the earth. The

fore-toes are long, and their claws large and considerably curved; on the hind-feet, the claws are very stout and broad, nearly double the size of those of the Northern hare.

The tail is rather long for the genus, upturned, and thickly clothed on both surfaces with long fur.

COLOUR.

Teeth, yellowish-white; the whole of the upper part of the body light brownish-yellow, blotched on the surface with black; in the winter, the whole of the back and the sides of the head become brownish-black, with here and there a mixture of reddish-brown visible on the surface; the fur beneath the long hairs is dark plumbeous, tipped with black. The long hairs, when examined singly, are dark-blue at the roots, then light buff, and are pointed with black. Behind the ears, rufous, with a stripe of a similar colour extending to the shoulders. A line around the eyes, light reddish-buff. Upper lip, chin, and belly, white, tinged with blue. Nails, in a winter specimen of a young male, dark-brown; in an old female procured in summer, yellowish; whiskers, black; inner surface of the ears, light grayish-white; outer surface, above, edged with black; under surface of the tail, pure white.

DIMENSIONS.

(The following measurements were taken by Dr. LEE, of Alabama, from a specimen in the flesh.)

| | | | |
|------------------------------------------------|-----------|----|---------|
| Length from point of nose to insertion of tail | - | 20 | inches. |
| “ of head | - - - - - | 4½ | do. |
| “ of ears, posteriorly | - - - - - | 3⅞ | do. |
| Height to shoulder | - - - - - | 11 | do. |
| Length of the hind-foot | - - - - - | 4½ | do. |
| “ “ middle hind-claw | - - - - - | 5⅞ | do. |
| “ of tail (vertebræ) | - - - - - | 2½ | do. |
| “ of tail, including fur | - - - - - | 3 | do. |

Weight of a female killed in the spring, (when suckling its young, and not in good condition,) 6lbs.

HABITS.

The habits of this animal are very singular, differing in one remarkable peculiarity from those of any other species of hare yet known, with the exception of the marsh-hare. Although the Swamp-Hare is occasionally seen on high grounds in the dense forest, it prefers low and

marshy places, or the neighbourhood of streams and ponds of water, to which it is fond of resorting. It swims with great facility from one little islet to another, and is generally found seeking its food in wet places, or near the water, as it subsists on the roots of various kinds of aquatic plants, especially on a species of iris growing in the water.

Persons who have given us information on the subject of this hare, inform us, that when first started, and whilst running, its trampings are louder, and can be heard at a greater distance, than those of any other hare.

As it suddenly leaps or bounds from its hiding place ere it is seen, it is apt to startle the rambler who has intruded upon its solitary retreat, and he may be impressed with the belief that he has started a young deer. When chased by dogs, the Swamp-Hare runs with great swiftness, and is able to escape from them without difficulty; but it almost invariably directs its flight towards the nearest pond, as if led by instinct to seek an element in which all traces of its scent are soon lost to its eager pursuers. There is a specimen of the Swamp-Hare, which we added to the collection of the Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia, considerably larger than the Northern hare; this individual, on being pursued by hounds, swam twice across the Alabama river, and was not captured till it had finally retreated to a hollow tree.

We have been informed that it is a very common habit of this species when pursued, to swim to the edge of some stream or pond, retreat beneath the overhanging roots of the trees that may be growing on its border, or seek for a secure shelter under the hollows made by the washing of the banks. The swiftness of foot possessed by this Hare, and the stratagems to which it is capable of resorting, might easily enable it to elude pursuit but for this habit of seeking for shelter as soon as it is chased, which is the cause of its being frequently captured.

When the waters in the swamps are low, it seeks the first hollow tree, where it is easily secured. In this manner, Major LEE informed us, that in his vicinity the boys and the domestics caught thirty or forty in three days.

The young of this hare are frequently found in nests formed of leaves and grasses, placed on hillocks in the swamps, or in the hollow of some fallen tree. We have been informed that it produces young at least twice in a season, and from four to six at a litter.

GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION.

We have not heard of the existence of this animal to the east or north of the State of Alabama, but it is numerous in all the swamps of the

western part of that State, is still more abundant in the State of Mississippi, and in the lower part of Louisiana, and is frequently brought by the Indians to the market of New Orleans. It was also obtained in Texas by DOUGLASS and by J. W. AUDUBON. GRAY states that it exists in California; we have however carefully inquired into the history of the specimen in the British Museum, which was received after the melancholy death of DOUGLASS, and have reason to believe that the label was accidentally misplaced, and that it came from the eastern portion of Texas.

GENERAL REMARKS.

Although all our hares bear a strong resemblance to each other, particularly in their summer colours, yet all have different marks, by which they can, with a little attention, be distinguished. The present species, in its colour on the upper surface and in its aquatic habits, is closely assimilated to the marsh-hare; it differs, however, very widely in other respects.

The Swamp-Hare is a third larger than the marsh-hare; the largest specimen of the latter in more than fifty that we measured, was only fourteen inches long, whilst the largest Swamp-Hare was twenty-two inches, and we are informed that it is often much larger. The tail of the marsh-hare is exceedingly short, its vertebræ being not more than an inch long, whilst that of the present species is two inches and an eighth, being more than double the length. The ears differ in the same proportion. The under surface of the tail of the marsh-hare is ash-coloured mixed with brown, whilst that of the present species is pure white. Its feet are thinly covered with hair, and its toes (which are capable of being widely spread) are well adapted to enable it to swim, and to pass over marshy and muddy places.

The tracks of this species, and of the marsh-hare, in the mud, leave a distinct impression of the toes; whilst on the contrary the tracks of the gray rabbit, the Northern hare, and the Polar hare, exhibit no such traces, their feet being so thickly clothed with long hair that even the points of the nails are scarcely perceptible. The present species is larger than the gray rabbit, being very nearly the size of the Northern hare, which it probably exceeds in weight. Indeed, the Northern hare and this species, when divested of their hides, are very nearly equal in size; but the fur of the former being loose and long, whilst that of the present species lies compact and smooth, the Northern hare appears to be the larger of the two. This species differs from the gray rabbit in

other particulars; whilst the points of the hair in the latter animal become whiter in winter, those of the Swamp-Hare become jet-black; whilst the gray rabbit strenuously avoids water, the present species plunges fearlessly into it, and finds it a congenial element.



Audubon, John James and Bachman, John. 1851. "Lepus Aquaticus, Swamp-Hare [Pl. XXXVII, male]." *The quadrupeds of North America* 1, 287–291.
<https://doi.org/10.5962/p.322465>.

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