Drawn on stone by W.E. Hitchcock

Californian Hare

Drawn from Nature by J.W. Audubon.

Lith. Printed & Col'd by J.T. Bowen, Philad^a

LEPUS CALIFORNICUS.—GRAY.

CALIFORNIAN HARE.

PLATE CXII.

L. magnitudine L. glacialis, formâ L. timide ; supra flavescens-fuscus, subtus albus, flavo valdetinctus.

CHARACTERS.

Nearly the size of the polar hare ; dark brown on the back, light brownish-red on the neck ; lower parts deeply tinged with yellow.

SYNONYMES.

LEPUS CALIFORNICUS. Gray, Mag. Nat. Hist. 1837, vol. i., new series, p. 586.

" RICHARDSONII. Bach. Jour. Acad. Nat. Sci., vol. viii. p. 88.

" BENNETTII. Gray, Zoology of the Voyage of H. M. S. Sulphur, Mamm., p. 35, pl. 14, 1843.

DESCRIPTION.

Head, small, and not elongated ; ears, very large, much longer than the head ; eyes, very large ; body, stout ; limbs, long and slender ; fur, of moderate length ; tail, long and flat ; feet, rather small ; legs and feet, thickly clothed with short hairs nearly concealing the nails.

COLOUR.

The back, from the shoulder to the insertion of the tail, is strongly marked with black and rufous-brown, the hairs being pale plumbeous for two thirds of their length from the roots, then very pale brown, then black, then yellowish-brown, and tipped with black. Chest, sides of the body, and outer surface of limbs, more or less rufous. Abdomen, whitish tinged with buff ; upper surface of the tail blackish-brown, lower surface yellowish-white ; around the eye, pale buff ; back of the neck, grayish cinnamon colour ; legs and feet, cinnamon. The outer surface of the ears is longitudinally divided into two colours, the anterior portion or half being grizzled reddish-brown, becoming darker as it approaches the tip of the ear, the hairs being annulated with black and pale yellow ; the posterior

portion dingy yellowish-white, growing lighter as it approaches the tip, until it blends with the black colour which terminates the upper half of the outside of the ear; the interior edge of the ear is pale yellow, each hair slightly tipped with black; one half of the inner surface of the ear is nearly naked, but covered with very delicate and short hairs, the other portion thinly clothed with hair gradually thickening towards the outer edge, where it is grizzly-brown; edge of the ear for two thirds from the head, yellowish-white; the remainder to the tip, soft velvety black. This black colour extends in a large patch on to the outer surface of the ear at the tip.

DIMENSIONS.

					Inches.	Lines.
Length from point of nose to root of tail,	-	-	-	-	22	
“ “ eye to point of nose,	-	-	-	-	2	1
Height of ear, posteriorly,	-	-	-	-	5	10
Heel, to point of middle claw,	-	-	-	-	4	8
Tail, including hair,	-	-	-	-	3	3

HABITS.

The habits of all hares are much the same; and this family is a general favourite for the beauty, timid gentleness, and fleetness its various species exhibit, although some of them are annoying to the gardener. In America, however, many species of Hare inhabit territories too far from cultivated fields or gardens for them to be able to nibble even at a cabbage plant.

Many pleasant evening hours have we passed, walking through forest-shaded roads in the last rays scattered here and there by the sinking sun, observing the playful “rabbits” leaping gracefully a few paces at a time, then stopping and looking about, ignorant of our proximity and unconscious of danger. But we are now to give the habits of the Californian Hare, for which take the following account of the animal as observed by J. W. AUDUBON:

“The Californian Hare appears to possess just brains enough to make him the greatest coward of all the tribe I have seen, for, once startled he is quite as wild as a deer, and equally heedless as to the course he takes, so that as he has not the keen sense of smell of the deer to warn him of danger in any direction, he sometimes makes a great fool of himself in his haste, and I have had these Hares run to within three feet of me, before I was seen, even where there was no cover but a sparse prairie grass.”

“It was after toiling night and day through the sands of the Colorado

desert, and resting afterwards at Vallecito and San Felipe, while marching along the streams through the rich fields of Santa Maria, that I saw the first Californian Hare. I knew him at sight: he showed no *white tail* as he ran, and looked almost black amongst the yellow broom-sedge as he divided it in his swift course. His legs seemed always under his body, for so quick was the movement that I could not see them extended, as in other Hares, from one bound to another; he seemed to alight on his feet perpendicularly at each leap, with a low-squatting springy touch to the earth, and putting his enormously long ears forward, and then back on his neck, and stretching out his head, appeared to fly over the undulating ridges of the prairie as a swallow skims for insects the surface of a sluggish river in summer."

Very few of these Hares were seen by J. W. AUDUBON's party until they had travelled some distance further north, and it was only after they had left the plains of the San Joaquin for the mines that they became a common animal, and in fact often their sole resource for the day's meat.

J. W. AUDUBON says that a single Hare of this species, with a little fat pork to fry it with, often lasted himself and a companion, as food when travelling, for two days. Nearly every miner has eaten of this fine Hare, which is well known in all the hilly portions of Upper California.

The Californian Hare brings forth about five young at a time, which are generally littered in the latter part of April or beginning of May. J. W. AUDUBON says: "I shot a female only a few days before her young would have been born: she had five beautiful little ones, the hair and feet perfect, and a white spot on the forehead of each was prominent. I never shot another afterwards, and was sad at the havoc I had committed."

We do not know whether this species breeds more than once in the year or not, but it probably does, as Mr. PEALE says: "A female killed on the twenty-fourth of September was still suckling her young."

The Californian Hare is more frequently met with in uplands, on mountain sides, and in bushy places, than in other situations. During the rainy season it was not seen by J. W. AUDUBON in low and wet grounds, although it doubtless resorts to them during the dry weather of summer.

Mr. PEALE says, these Hares "when running, carry the ears erect, and make three short and one long leap; and that the Indians catch them by setting hedges of thorny brush, with openings at intervals, in which they set snares, so constructed as to catch the Hares when passing, without the use of springes; the noose is made of a substance like hemp, very strong, and neatly twisted with cords."

GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION.

This species was seen by J. W. AUDUBON during his journey from Texas to California ; it was first met to the northward of the Colorado desert, and was quite abundant as the party approached the mining districts of California, where it was found as far north as the American fork ; it was met with in the southern parts of Oregon by the United States Exploring Expedition. We are not informed whether it exists to the eastward of the Nevada range of mountains.

GENERAL REMARKS.

This Hare was first obtained by Mr. DOUGLAS, and sent with other animals from California to England. It was described by Mr. GRAY, and being, from its large size and rich colouring, one of the most conspicuous among the North American Hares, we regret that that eminent naturalist should have also (by some mistake) given it the name of *L. Bennettii*, and for ourselves we must plead guilty to having erroneously named it *L. Richardsonii*. The identity of this beautiful animal has been also somewhat obscured by Mr. PEALE, who confounded it with a species from the Cape of Good Hope, which bears the name of *Longicaudatus*, and was described in London.

Audubon, John James and Bachman, John. 1854. "Lepus californicus, Californian Hare, [Pl. CXII]." *The quadrupeds of North America* 3, 53–56.
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