MEPHITIS MESOLEUCA.—LICHT.

TEXAN SKUNK.

PLATE LIII.—MALE.

M. Vitta solitaria media antice (in vertice) rotundata, acque lata ad basin caudae usque continuata, hac tota alba.

CHARACTERS.

The whole back, from the forehead to the tail, and the tail, white ; nose not covered with hair.

SYNONYMES.

MEPHITIS MESOLEUCA, Lichtenstein. Darstellung neuer oder wenig bekannter Säugthiere. Berlin, 1827, 1834. Tab. 44, Fig. 2.

MEPHITIS NASUTA, Bennett. Proceedings of the Zoological Society, 1833, p. 39.

M. MESOLEUCA, Licht. Ueber die Gattung Mephitis. Berlin, 1838, p. 23.

DESCRIPTION.

In form, this species bears a considerable resemblance to the common American skunk, (*Mephitis chinga*.) Like all the other species of skunk, this animal has a broad and fleshy body ; it is wider at the hips than at the shoulders, and when walking, the head is carried near the ground, whilst the back is obliquely raised six or seven inches higher ; it stands low on its legs, and progresses rather slowly. Forehead, slightly rounded ; eyes, small ; ears, short and rounded ; hair, coarse and long ; under fur, sparse, woolly, and not very fine ; tail, of moderate length and bushy ; nose, for three-fourths of an inch above the snout, naked. This is a characteristic mark, by which it may always be distinguished from the common American skunk, the latter being covered with short hair to the snout. Palms naked.

COLOUR.

The whole of the long hair, including the under fur on the back, and the tail on both surfaces, is white. This broad stripe commences on the forehead about two inches from the point of the nose, running near the ears,

On Stone by W^m H. Hichcock

European Skunk.

and in a straight line along the sides and over the haunches, taking in the whole of the tail. The nails are white ; the whole of the under surface of the body black, with here and there a white hair interspersed. On the forefeet around the palms and on the edges of the under surface, there are coarse whitish hairs.

The peculiarities in the colour of this species appear to be very uniform, as the specimens we examined in the Berlin Museum and in the collection of the Zoological Society in London, corresponded precisely with the specimen from which this description has been made.

DIMENSIONS.

	Ft.	Inches.
From point of nose to root of tail, - - -	1	4 $\frac{1}{2}$
Tail (vertebræ), - - - - -	0	7
Do. to end of hair, - - - - -	0	11
Breadth of head between the ears, - - -	0	3
Height of ear, - - - - -	0	0 $\frac{3}{10}$
Length of heel to longest claw, - - - -	0	2 $\frac{1}{2}$
Breadth of white stripe on the middle of the back,	0	5

Weight, 5 lbs.

HABITS.

This odoriferous animal is found in Texas and Mexico, and is very similar in its habits to the common skunk of the Eastern, Middle and South-western States. A specimen procured by J. W. AUDUBON, who travelled through a portion of the State of Texas in 1845 and 6, for the purpose of obtaining a knowledge of the quadrupeds of that country, was caught alive in the neighbourhood of the San Jacinto ; it was secured to the pack saddle of one of his baggage mules, but managed in some way to escape during the day's march, and as the scent was still strong on the saddle, it was not missed until the party arrived at the rancho of Mr. McFADDEN, who kept a house of entertainment for man and beast, which by this time was greatly needed by the travellers.

The almost endless varieties of the *Mephitis chinga*, the common skunk, many of which have been described as distinct species by naturalists, have, from our knowledge of their curious yet not specific differences, led us to admit any new species with doubt ; but from the peculiar characteristics of this animal, there can be no hesitation in awarding to Prof. LICHTENSTEIN the honour of having given to the world the first knowledge of this interesting quadruped.

The *Mephitis Mesoleuca* is found on the brown, broomy, sedgy plains, as

well as in the woods, and the cultivated districts of Texas and Mexico. Its food consists in part of grubs, beetles, and other insects, and occasionally a small quadruped or bird, the eggs of birds, and in fact everything which this carnivorous but timid animal can appropriate to its sustenance.

The retreats of this Skunk are hollows in the roots of trees or fallen trunks, cavities under rocks, &c. ; and it is, like the northern species, easily caught when seen, (if any one has the resolution to venture on the experiment,) as it will not endeavour to escape unless it be very near its hiding place, in which case it will avoid its pursuer by retreating into its burrow, and there remaining for some time motionless, if not annoyed by a dog, or by digging after it.

The stomach of the specimen from which our drawing was made, contained a number of worms, in some degree resembling the tape worm at times found in the human subject. Notwithstanding this circumstance, the individual appeared to be healthy and was fat. The rainy season having set in (or at least the weather being invariably stormy for some time) after it was killed, it became necessary to dry its skin in a chimney. When first taken, the white streak along the back was as pure and free from any stain or tinge of darkness or soiled colour as new fallen snow. The two glands containing the fetid matter, discharged from time to time by the animal for its defence, somewhat resembled in appearance a soft egg.

This species apparently takes the place of the common American skunk, (*Mephitis chinga*,) in the vicinity of the ranchos and plantations of the Mexicans, and is quite as destructive to poultry, eggs, &c., as its northern relative. We have not ascertained anything about its season of breeding, or the time the female goes with young ; we have no doubt, however, that in these characteristics it resembles the other and closely allied species.

The long and beautiful tail of this Skunk makes it conspicuous among the thickets or in the musquit bushes of Texas, and it most frequently keeps this part elevated so that in high grass or weeds it is first seen by the hunters who may be looking for the animal in such places.

GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION.

The *Mephitis Mesoleuca* is not met with in any portion of the United States eastward and northward of Texas. It is found in the latter State and in most parts of Mexico. We have, however, not seen any skunk from South America which corresponds with it.

GENERAL REMARKS.

Naturalists have been somewhat at a loss to decide on the name by which this species should be designated, and to what author the credit is due of having been the first describer.

The specimens obtained by LICHTENSTEIN were procured by Mr. DEPPE, in the vicinity of Chico, in Mexico, in 1825, and deposited in the museum of Berlin. In occasional papers published by Dr. LICHTENSTEIN, from 1827 to 1834, this species with many others was first published. In 1833, BENNETT published in the proceedings of the Zoological Society, the same species under the name of *M. Nasuta*. The papers of LICHTENSTEIN, although printed and circulated at Berlin, were not reprinted and collected into a volume till 1834. Having seen the original papers as well as the specimens at Berlin, and being satisfied of their earlier publication, we have no hesitation in adopting the name of LICHTENSTEIN as the first describer and publisher.

Audubon, John James and Bachman, John. 1851. "Mephitis mesoleuca, Texan Skunk [Pl. LIII, male]." *The quadrupeds of North America* 2, 18-21.

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