On Stone by W. E. Horscock

Little Harvest Mouse

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

Engr. Printed & Col'd by J. T. Bowen, Phil.

MUS HUMILIS.—BACHMAN.

LITTLE HARVEST MOUSE.

PLATE LXV.—MALES AND FEMALES.

M. corpore supra rutilo-cinereo, et quoad baccas et lineam in utrisque lateribus ferrugineo ; subtus flavo-albente. M. musculus minor.

CHARACTERS.

Smaller than the house mouse ; colour, reddish-gray above ; cheeks and line along the side, light ferruginous ; beneath, white with a yellowish tinge.

SYNONYMES.

MUS HUMILIS, Bach. Read before the Academy of Nat. Sciences, 1837. Journal Acad., vol. vii.

MUS HUMILIS, Bach., Acad. Nat. Sciences, Oct. 5th, 1841.

DESCRIPTION.

Incisors, small and short ; head, much more rounded, nose, less pointed, and skull, proportionably broader than the corresponding portions in the common house-mouse ; legs, rather short, and slender ; there are four toes on the fore-feet, with a minute and almost imperceptible nail in the place of a thumb ; on the hind-foot there are five toes ; claws short, weak, sharp, and slightly hooked ; nose, short and pointed ; the moustaches are composed of a few hairs, not rigid, of the length of the head ; the eyes are smaller and less prominent than those of the white-footed mouse, resembling those of the common house-mouse ; the ears are of moderate size, broad at base, erect, ovate, clothed on both surfaces and around the edges with short adpressed hairs, extending a little beyond the fur ; palms naked ; upper surface of feet covered with hairs to the end of nails ; the tail is round when the animal is in a living state, but after the specimens are dried, becomes square ; it is thinly clothed with short hairs ; the fur on the whole body is short, glossy, and very fine.

COLOUR.

Teeth, yellow; nails, white; eyes, black; moustaches, mostly white; a few near the nostrils black; nose, cheeks, ears on both surfaces, and a line extending from the sides of the neck running along the shoulder and separating the colours of the back and under surface, dark buff; on the back, the hairs are plumbeous at the roots, then yellowish fawn colour; upper lips, chin, and throat, white; neck and under surface of body white shaded with buff.

DIMENSIONS.

									Inches
From point of nose to root of tail,	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	$2\frac{3}{4}$
Tail,	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
Height of ear,	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	$\frac{2}{8}$

HABITS.

By the casual observer, this diminutive little species, on being started from its retreat in the long grass, or under some fence or pile of brushwood, might be mistaken for the young of the white-footed mouse (*Mus leucopus*), or that of the jumping mouse (*Meriones Americanus*). It however differs widely from either, and bears but a general resemblance to any of our American species.

About twenty years ago, whilst we were endeavouring to make ourselves acquainted with the species of smaller rodentia existing in the Southern States, we discovered this little Mouse in the grass fields and along the fences of the plantations a few miles from Charleston, S. C. We procured it in the way in which field mice and other small quadrupeds in all countries can be most easily obtained, by having what are denominated figure of 4 traps, set along fences and ditches in the evening, baited with meat and seeds of various kinds. On the following morning we usually were rewarded with a number of several interesting species. We on two occasions preserved this Mouse in a domestic state, once for a year, during which time it produced two broods of young: the first consisting of four were born in May, the second of three in July. They reared all their young. We fed them at first on pea or ground nuts, (*Hypogea arachis*), cornmeal, (maize,) the latter they preferred boiled, but after having tempted their appetites with the seeds of the Egyptian Millet, (*Pennisitum tippoideum*), we discovered that they relished it so well, we allowed it finally to become their exclusive food. They refused meat on

all occasions. They were very gentle, allowed themselves to be taken into the hand, and made no attempt to bite, or scarcely any to escape. The young, when born, were naked and blind, but in a very few days became covered with hair, and at a week old were seen peeping out of their nests. We did not discover that the female dragged the young, attached to the teats, in the manner of the white-footed mouse. We placed a female in a cage with a male of the white-footed mouse: they lived on tolerably good terms for six months, but produced no young. We then placed the same female with the male of the common mouse. The latter immediately commenced fighting with our little pet, and in the morning she was found dead in the cage, bitten and mutilated in various places.

This to us is a rare species; after a search of twenty years we have obtained only a dozen specimens from the fields. The nests, which we have oftener seen than their occupants, were placed on the surface of the ground among the long grass, composed of soft withered grasses, and covered over in the manner of the nest of WILSON'S meadow mouse. We have also seen the nests of this species under brush-heaps and beneath the rails of fences, similarly constructed.

We doubt whether this species is of much injury to the farmer. It consumes but little grain, is more fond of residing near grass fields, on the seeds of which it subsists, than among the wheat fields. We have observed in its nest small stores of grass seeds—the outer husks and other remains of the Broom grass (*Andropogon dissitiflorum*)—also that of the Crab grass (*Digitaria sanguinalis*), and small heaps of the seeds of several species of *paspalum*, *poa* and *panicum*, especially those of *panicum Italicum*.

The specimen from which this description was taken was a little the largest of any we have seen. It was a female captured on the 10th December, and containing four young in its matrix; we presume therefore that this species, like the field mice in general, produce young several times during the summer.

GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION.

We have met with this species sparingly in South Carolina along the seaboard, and received it from Dr. BARRATT, of Abbeville, S. C. We procured a specimen in Ebenezer, (Georgia,) where the inhabitants stated they had never before observed it. A specimen was sent to us by our friend Mr. RUFFIN, who obtained it in Virginia. If we have not inadvertently blended two species, this animal can be traced as far to the north-east as the State of New-York, several having been procured in traps on the farms in the vicinity of the city.

GENERAL REMARKS.

We sent a minute description of this species to the Academy of Natural Sciences in 1837, which was read by our friend Dr. MORTON ; although informed that it was published in the transactions of the Society, we have not seen it in print. A second description was published in the transactions of the same Society, October, 1841. We have not ascertained that the species has been noticed by any other naturalist.

In examining the teeth of this species, we have found that the tuberculous summits on the molars were less distinct than in those which legitimately belong to the genus *Mus*, and that there are angular ridges on the enamel by which it approaches the genus *Arvicola* ; it is in fact an intermediate species, but in the aggregate of its characteristics perhaps approaches nearest to *Mus*, where we for the present have concluded to leave it.

Audubon, John James and Bachman, John. 1851. "Mus humilis, Little Harvest Mouse [Pl. LXV, males and females]." *The quadrupeds of North America* 2, 103–106. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.322490>.

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