Drawn on Stone by W.E. Hitchcock

Pennant's Marten or Fisher.

GENUS MUSTELA.—Cuv.

DENTAL FORMULA.

$$\text{Incisive } \frac{6}{6}; \text{ Canine } \frac{1-1}{1-1}; \text{ Molar } \frac{5-5}{6-6} = 38.$$

Head, small and oval; muzzle, rather large; ears, short and round; body, long, vermiform; tail, usually long and cylindrical; legs, short; five toes on each foot, armed with sharp, crooked, slightly retractile claws. No anal pouch, but a small gland which secretes a thickish offensive fluid. Fur, very fine.

This genus differs from the genus *PUTORIUS*, having four carnivorous teeth on each side, in the upper jaw, instead of three, the number the true weasels exhibit, and, the last carnivorous tooth on the lower jaw, has a rounded lobe on the inner side, which renders this genus somewhat less carnivorous in its habits than *PUTORIUS*; and consequently a slight diminution of the cruelty and ferocity displayed by animals of the latter genus, may be observed in those forming the present.

There are about twelve species of true Martens known, four of which inhabit North America.

The generic name *MUSTELA*, is derived from the Latin word *mustela*, a weasel.

MUSTELA CANADENSIS.—SCHREBER.

PENNANT'S MARTEN OR FISHER.

BLACK FOX OR BLACK CAT OF THE NORTHERN HUNTERS.

PLATE XLI.—MALE.

Capite et humeris cano fuscoque mixtis; naso, labiis, cruribus, et cauda, fusco-nigris.

CHARACTERS.

Head and shoulders, mixed with gray and brown; nose, lips, legs, and tail, dark brown.

SYNONYMES.

- LE PEKAN, Buffon, vol. xiii., p. 304, A. D. 1749.
 MUSTELA CANADENSIS, Schreber, Säugethiere, p. 492, 1775.
 MUSTELA PENNANTI, Erxleben, Syst., p. 470, A. D. 1777.
 FISHER, Penn., Arct. Zool., 4 vols., vol. i., p. 82, A. D. 1784.
 MUSTELA CANADENSIS, Gmel., Linn., vol. i., p. 95, 1788.
 WEJACK, Hearne's Journey.
 FISHER, or BLACK FOX, Lewis and Clarke, vol. iii., p. 25.
 FISHER, WEASEL, or PEKAN, Warden's United States.
 MUSTELA PENNANTI Sabine, Frank. First Journey, p. 651.
 MUSTELA CANADENSIS, Harlan, F., p. 65.
 " " Godman, vol. i., p. 203.
 MUSTELA GODMANI, Less., Mamm., p. 150.
 MUSTELA CANADENSIS, Rich., F. B. A., p. 52.
 PEKAN or FISHER, Dekay, Nat. Hist. N. Y., p. 31.

DESCRIPTION.

The head of this species bears a stronger resemblance to that of a dog than to the head of a cat. Its canine teeth, in the upper jaw, are so long, that with the slightest movement of the lip they are exposed. Head, broad and round, contracting rather suddenly toward the nose, which is acute. Eyes, rather small and oblique; ears, low, broad, semicircular, and far apart, covered on both surfaces with short soft fur; whiskers, half the length of the head; body, long, and formed for agility and strength.

The pelage consists of a short fine down next the skin, intermixed with longer and coarser hairs about an inch and a half in length; these hairs are longer on the posterior parts of the animal than on the shoulders.

The feet are robust. Fore-feet, shorter than the hind-feet, thickly clothed with rather fine and short hairs; nails, long, strong, curved, and sharp; soles, hairy; the toes on all the feet are connected at the base by a short hairy web; the callosities consequently make only a slight impression when the animal is walking or running on the snow.

Tail, long, bushy, and gradually diminishing to a point toward the extremity.

This species has so strong a smell of musk, (like the pine marten,)

that we have found the skin somewhat unpleasant to our olfactories, several years after it had been prepared as a specimen.

COLOUR.

Fur on the back, from the roots to near the extremity, chesnut-brown, tipped with reddish-brown and light gray. On the head, shoulders, and fore part of the back, there are so many long whitish hairs interspersed, that they produce a somewhat hoary appearance. Whiskers, nose, chin, ears, legs, feet, and tail, dark-brown; margins of the ears, light-brown; hips and posterior part of the back, darker than the shoulders; eyes, yellowish-brown; nails, light horn-colour.

In some specimens, we have seen a white spot on the throat, and a line of the same colour on the belly; others, (as was the case with the one from which our drawing was made,) have no white markings on the body. We have seen a specimen, nearly white, with a brown head. Another, obtained in Buncombe county, North Carolina, was slightly hoary on the whole upper surface.

DIMENSIONS.

From point of nose to root of tail	-	-	-	23	inches.
Tail, (vertebræ)	-	-	-	12	do.
“ to end of hair	-	-	-	14½	do.
Breadth of head	-	-	-	3½	do.
Height of ear	-	-	-	1	do.
Breadth of ear	-	-	-	2	do.
From point of nose to eye	-	-	-	2	do.
“ heel to point of longest nail	-	-	-	4¼	do.

Weight, 8½ lbs.

HABITS.

Although this species is represented as having been rather common in every part of the Northern and Middle States, in the early periods of our history, and is still met with in diminished numbers, in the thinly settled portions of our country; very little of its history or habits has been written, and much is still unknown. We have occasionally met with it, but it has been to us far from a common species. Even in the mountainous portions of the Northern and Eastern States, the Fisher, thirty years ago, was as difficult to procure as the Bay lynx. It has since become still more rare, and in places where it was then known,

scarcely any vestige of the knowledge of its former existence can now be traced.

Dr. DEKAY (Nat. Hist. N. Y., p. 32, 1843,) states that, "in Hamilton county, (N. Y.,) it is still numerous and troublesome." On an excursion we made in the State of New-York, 1827, we heard of it occasionally near the head waters of Lake Champlain, along the St. Lawrence, and to the west as far as Lake Erie, but it was every where represented as a species that was fast disappearing.

Whilst residing in the northern part of our native State, (New-York,) thirty-five years ago, the hunters were in the habit of bringing us two or three specimens of this Marten in the course of a winter. They obtained them by following their tracks in the snow, when the animals had been out in quest of food on the previous night, thus tracing them to the hollow trees in which they were concealed, which they chopped down. They informed us that as a tree was falling, the Fisher would dart from the hollow, which was often fifty feet from the ground, and leap into the snow, when the dogs usually seized and killed him, although not without a hard struggle, as the Fisher was infinitely more dangerous to their hounds than either the gray or the red fox. They usually called this species the Black Fox.

A servant, on one occasion, came to us before daylight, asking us to shoot a raccoon for him, which, after having been chased by his dogs the previous night, had taken to so large a tree that he neither felt disposed to climb it nor to cut it down. On our arrival at the place, it was already light, and the dogs were barking furiously at the foot of the tree. We soon perceived that instead of being a raccoon, the animal was a far more rare and interesting species, a Fisher. As we were anxious to study its habits we did not immediately shoot, but teased it by shaking some grape vines that had crept up nearly to the top of the tree. The animal not only became thoroughly frightened, but seemed furious; he leaped from branch to branch, showing his teeth and growling at the same time; now and then he ran half way down the trunk of the tree, elevating his back in the manner of an angry cat, and we every moment expected to see him leap off and fall among the dogs. He was brought down after several discharges from the gun. He seemed extremely tenacious of life, and was game to the last, holding on to the nose of a dog with a dying grasp. This animal proved to be a male; the body measured twenty-five inches, and the tail, including the fur, fifteen. The servant who had traced him, informed us that he appeared to have far less speed than a fox, that he ran for ten minutes through a swamp in a straight direction, and then took to a tree.

The only opportunity that was ever afforded us of judging of the speed of the Fisher occurred near the Virginia Gray-Sulphur Springs, in 1839. We had ascended Peter's Mountain in search of rare plants for our herbarium; out of health and fatigued, we had for some time been seated on a rock to rest, when we observed a gray squirrel pass within ten feet of us, seemingly in a great fright, and with all the speed it could command, with a Fisher in full pursuit. They were both too much occupied with their own affairs to take any notice of us. The Fisher seemed to make more rapid progress than the squirrel, and we feel confident that if the latter had not mounted a tree it would have been overtaken before it could have advanced many feet farther; it ran rapidly up the sides of a cucumber tree, (*Magnolia acuminati*,) still pursued by its hungry foe. The squirrel leaped lightly among the smaller branches, on which its heavier pursuer seemed unwilling to trust himself. At length the affrighted animal pitched from one of the topmost boughs and landed on its feet unhurt among the rocks beneath. We expected every moment to see the Fisher give us a specimen also of his talent at lofty tumbling, but he seemed to think that the "better part of valour was discretion," and began to run down the stem of the tree. At this point we interfered. Had he imitated the squirrel in its flying leap, he might have been entitled to the prey, provided he could overtake it; but as he chose to exercise some stratagy and jockeying in the race, when the chances were so much in his favour, we resolved to end the chase by running to the foot of the tree which the Fisher was descending. He paused on the opposite side as if trying to ascertain whether he had been observed; we were without a gun, but rattled away with a knife on our botanizing box, which seemed to frighten the Marten in his turn, most effectually;—the more noise we created the greater appeared to be his terror; after ascending to the top of the tree he sprang to another, which he rapidly descended, till within twenty feet of the earth, when he jumped to the ground, and with long leaps ran rapidly down the side of the mountain, and was out of sight in a few moments.

This scene occurred in the morning of a warm day in the month of July, a proof that this species is not altogether nocturnal in its habits. We are, however, inclined to believe that the above was only an exception to the general character of the animal.

Species that are decidedly nocturnal in their habits, frequently may be seen moving about by day during the period when they are engaged in providing for their young. Thus the raccoon, the opossum, and all our hares, are constantly met with in spring, and early summer, in the morn-

ing and afternoon, whilst in the autumn and winter they only move about by night.

In the many fox-hunts, in which our neighbours were from time to time engaged, not far from our residence at the north, during the period when we obtained the information concerning their primitive mode of enjoying that amusement, which we have laid before our readers, in pages 49 and 50, (where we also spoke of Pennant's Marten as not being very scarce at that time in Rensselaer county, N. Y.,) we never heard of their having encountered a single Fisher in the day-time; but when they traversed the same grounds at night, in search of raccoons, it was not unusual for them to discover and capture this species. We were informed by the trappers that they caught the Fisher in their traps only by night.

The specimen, from which the figure in our plate was drawn, was taken alive in some part of the Alleghany Mountains, in the State of Pennsylvania, and we soon afterwards received a letter from our esteemed friend, SPENCER F. BAIRD, Esq., of Carlisle, in that State, informing us of its having been captured, which enabled us, through that gentleman, to purchase it. We received it at New-York, in good condition, in a case tinned inside, with iron bars in front, to prevent the animal from making its escape, as it was so strong and so well supplied with sharp teeth that it could easily have eaten its way out of a common wooden box. In Mr. BAIRD's note he says: "All the account I was able to procure respecting this species was the following:—It was found in company with an older one, in Peters' Mountain, six miles above Harrisburgh, about five weeks ago. (His letter is dated Carlisle, March 16th, 1844.) After a most desperate resistance the old one was killed, after having beaten off the dogs, to whose assistance the hunters were obliged to come. This individual ran up a tree, and being stoned by the hunters, jumped off from a height of about forty feet! when being a little stunned by the leap, the men ran up quickly, threw their coats over it, and thus secured it. The old one was said to have been about the size of a pointer dog. The young one is very savage, and emits a rather strong musky odour."

We kept this individual alive for some days, feeding it on raw meat, pieces of chicken, and now and then a bird. It was voracious, and very spiteful, growling, snarling and spitting when approached, but it did not appear to suffer much uneasiness from being held in captivity, as, like many other predacious quadrupeds, it grew fat, being better supplied with food than when it had been obliged to cater for itself in the woods.

The older one, which, as Mr. BAIRD mentions, was killed by the dogs and the hunters, was a female, and no doubt was the mother of the one that was captured, and probably died in the hope of saving her young.

On several occasions we have seen the tracks of the Fisher in the snow; they resemble those of the pine marten, but are double their size. To judge by them, the animal advances by short leaps in the manner of a mink.

Pennant's Marten appears to prefer low swampy grounds: we traced one which had followed a trout stream for some distance, and ascertained that it had not gone into the water. Marks were quite visible in different places where it had scratched up the snow by the side of logs and piles of timber, to seek for mice or other small quadrupeds, and we have no doubt it preys upon the Northern hare, gray rabbit, and ruffed grouse, as we observed a great many tracks of those species in the vicinity. It further appears, that this animal makes an occasional meal on species which are much more closely allied to it than those just mentioned. In a letter we received from Mr. FOTHERGILL, in which he furnished us with notes on the habits of some of the animals existing near Lake Ontario, he informs us that "a Fisher was shot by a hunter named MARSH, near Port Hope, who said it was up in a tree, in close pursuit of a pine marten, which he also brought with it." Mr. FOTHERGILL stuffed them both at the time.

LEWIS and CLARK state, that in Oregon the Fisher captures not only the squirrel, but the raccoon, and that in pursuing them it leaps from tree to tree.

RICHARDSON remarks that, "the Fisher is said to prey much on frogs in the summer season; but I have been informed that its favourite food is the Canada porcupine, which it kills by biting in the belly." He says also, "it will feed on the hoards of frozen fish laid up by the residents."

We can scarcely conceive in what manner it is able to overturn the porcupine, so as to bite it on the belly, as it is large and heavy, and is armed with bristles at all points.

It is stated by Dr. DEKAY, on the authority of a person who resided many years near Lake Oneida, New-York, that the name (Fisher) "was derived from its singular fondness for the fish used to bait traps."

An individual of this species, which had been caught in a steel-trap, was brought to Charleston and exhibited in a menagerie. It had been taken only a few months, and was sullen and spiteful; when fed, it gulped down a moderate quantity of meat in great haste, swallowing it nearly whole, and then retired in a growling humour to a dark corner of its cage.

The Fisher is represented as following the line of traps set by the trappers, and in the manner of the wolverene, robbing them of their bait. The season for hunting this species is stated, by Dr. DEKAY, to commence in the western part of New-York, about the 10th of October, and to last till the middle of May; and he says the ordinary price paid for each skin is a dollar and a half.

This species brings forth once a year, depositing its young in the trunk of a large tree, usually some thirty or forty feet from the ground. Dr. RICHARDSON observes that it produces from two to four young at a litter; DEKAY confines the number to two. We once saw three extracted from the body of a female on the 20th of April, in the northern part of New-York.

GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION.

This species inhabits a wide extent of country. To the north it exists, according to RICHARDSON, as far as Great Slave Lake, latitude 63°. It is found at Labrador, and extends across the continent to the Pacific. It is stated by all our authors that it does not exist further south than Pennsylvania. This is an error, as we saw it on the mountains of Virginia. We had an opportunity of examining a specimen obtained by Dr. GIBBES, of Columbia, South Carolina, from the neighbourhood of Ashville, Buncombe county, North Carolina. We have seen several skins procured in East Tennessee, and we have heard of at least one individual that was captured near Flat-Rock, in that State, latitude 35°.

We have also seen many skins from the Upper Missouri; and the Fisher is enumerated, by LEWIS and CLARKE, as one of the species existing on the Pacific Ocean, in the vicinity of the Columbia River.

GENERAL REMARKS.

Notwithstanding the fact that on the large plate of this animal in our folio edition we gave to LINNÆUS the credit of having first applied a scientific name to this species, we must now transfer it to SCHREBER, by whom, LINNÆUS having been unacquainted with it, it was described in 1775. It was described two years afterwards by ERXLEBEN, and in 1788, by GMELIN, &c. It is probable that, by some mistake, the habits of the mink have been ascribed to the Fisher; hence its English name seems to be inappropriate; but as it appears to be entitled to it, by right of long possession, we do not feel disposed to change it. We are, however, not quite sure of its having no claim to the name by its mode of living. Its partially webbed feet seem

indicative of aquatic habits; it is fond of low swampy places, follows streams, and eats fish when in captivity. We feel pretty confident that it does not dive after the finny tribes, but it is not improbable that it surprises them in shallow water; and we are well informed that, like the raccoon, it searches under the banks of water-courses for frogs, &c.

By the Canadian hunters and trappers, it is universally called the Pekan. In New-England and the Northern counties of New-York it is sometimes named the Black Fox, but more frequently is known as the Fisher. According to DEKAY, it is called the Black Cat by the inhabitants of the western portion of New-York.

Audubon, John James and Bachman, John. 1851. "Mustela Canadensis, Pennant's Marten or Fisher [Pl. XLI, male]." *The quadrupeds of North America* 1, 307–315. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.322497>.

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