Drawn on Stone by R. Fremley

Rocky Mountain Vole

Drawn from Nature by J. Audubon FRS&LS.

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NEOTOMA DRUMMONDII.—RICHARDSON.

ROCKY MOUNTAIN NEOTOMA.

PLATE XXIX. Winter and Summer colours.

N. subtus albida; supra hyeme flavo-fuscescens, æstate saturate cinereus; cauda crassa, corpore longiore muse decumano robustior.

CHARACTERS.

Colour, above, yellowish-brown in winter and dark-ash in summer; whitish beneath; tail, bushy and longer than the body; larger than the Norway rat.

SYNONYMES.

RAT OF THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS, Lewis and Clarke, vol. iii., p. 41.

MYOXUS DRUMMONDII, Rich., Zool. Jour., 1828, p. 5, 7.

NEOTOMA DRUMMONDII, Rich., Fauna Boreali Americana, p. 137, pl. 7.

DESCRIPTION.

This species bears a striking resemblance to the Florida rat. It differs from the Norway rat by its longer and broader ears, and by its bushy tail and light active form. Fur, long and loose, bearing a considerable resemblance to that of the gray rabbit; nose, rather obtuse; the nostrils have a very narrow naked margin; the tip of the nose is covered with short hairs; ears, large, oval, and rounded, nearly naked within, except near the margins, where they are slightly clothed with short hairs. On the outer surface there are a few more hairs, but not enough to conceal the skin beneath; eyes, small, much concealed by the fur; whiskers, like hog's bristles, very strong, the longest reaching to the shoulders; neck, short, and fully as thick as the head.

Fore-legs, short; feet, of moderate size, with four toes; claws, small, compressed, and pointed. The third toe nearly equals the middle one, which is the longest, the first is a little shorter, and the outer one not more than half the length of the other two; there is also the rudiment of a thumb, which is armed with a minute nail. The toes of the hind-feet

are longer than those of the fore-feet, and the claws less hooked; the middle toe is the longest, those on each side of it of nearly an equal length; the outer one a little shorter, and the inner shortest of all. The palms on the fore and hind-feet are naked; but the toes, even beyond the nails, are covered with short, adpressed hairs. The hairs of the tail (which are not capable of a distichous arrangement) are short near the root, and gradually lengthen toward the end, where it is large and bushy, the hairs being one inch in length.

COLOUR.

Incisors, yellow; on the whole of the back, the head, shoulders, and outsides of the thighs, a dusky darkish-brown, proceeding from a mixture of yellowish-brown and black hairs. From the roots to near the tips, the fur is of a dark lead-colour, tipped with light-brown and black. The sides of the face and the ventral aspect, are bluish-gray. Margin of the upper lip, chin, feet, and under surface, dull white; whiskers, black and white, the former colour predominating; tail, grayish-brown above, dull yellowish-white beneath.

The above is the colour of this species from the end of summer through the following winter to the time of shedding the hair in May; when in its new coat it has far less of yellowish-brown, and puts on a gray appearance on the back, this colour gradually assuming more of the yellowish hue as the autumn advances and the fur lengthens and thickens toward winter.

DIMENSIONS.

From point of nose to root of tail	-	-	-	9 inches.
Tail (vertebræ)	-	-	-	7½ do.
Tail, including fur	-	-	-	8½ do.
Height of ear, posteriorly	-	-	-	1 do.
Length of whiskers	-	-	-	4 do.

HABITS.

We regret that from personal observation, we have no information to give in regard to the habits of this species, having never seen it in a living state. It was, however, seen by LEWIS and CLARKE, by DRUMMOND, DOUGLASS, NUTTALL, and TOWNSEND. According to the accounts given by these travellers, this *Neotoma* appears to have nearly the same general habits as the smaller species, (*N. Floridana*,) the Florida rat, but is much more destructive than the latter. It has a strong propensity to gnaw, cut to

pieces, and carry to its nest every thing left in its way. The trappers dread its attacks on their furs more than they would the approach of a grizzly bear. These rats have been known to gnaw through whole packs of furs in a single night. The blankets of the sleeping travellers are sometimes cut to pieces by them, and they carry off small articles from the camp of the hunter.

"Mr. DRUMMOND," says RICHARDSON, "placed a pair of stout English shoes on the shelf of a rock, and as he thought, in perfect security; but on his return, after an absence of a few days, he found them gnawed into fragments as fine as saw-dust."

Mr. DOUGLASS, who unfortunately lost his life in ascending Mouna Roa, in the Sandwich Islands, by falling into a pit for catching wild bulls, where he was gored by one of those animals, was one of the most indefatigable explorers of the Western portions of our continent, and kept a journal of his travels and discoveries in natural history. It was never published, but a few copies were printed some time after his death, by his friend and patron, Sir WILLIAM HOOKER, who presented one of them to us. In it we found the following account of this animal:—

"During the night I was annoyed by the visit of a herd of rats, which devoured every particle of seed I had collected, ate clean through a bundle of dried plants, and carried off my soap, brush, and razor. As one was taking away my inkstand, which I had been using shortly before, and which lay close to my pillow, I raised my gun, which, with my faithful dog, always is placed under my blanket by my side with the muzzle to my feet, and hastily gave him the contents. When I saw how large and strong a creature this rat was, I ceased to wonder at the exploits of the herd in depriving me of my property. The body and tail together measured a foot and a half; the hair was brown, the belly white; it had enormous ears three quarters of an inch long, and whiskers three inches in length. Unfortunately the specimen was spoiled by the shot which in my haste to secure the animal and recover my inkstand, I did not take time to change; but a female of the same sort venturing to return some hours after, I handed it a smaller shot, which did not destroy the skin. It was in all respects like the former, except being a little smaller." This identical specimen is in the museum of the Zoological Society of London, where we examined it.

Mr. TOWNSEND has kindly furnished us with some remarks on this species, from which we make the following extracts:—"I never saw it in the Rocky Mountains, but it is very common near the Columbia river. It is found in the storehouses of the inhabitants, where it supplies the place of the common rat, which is not found here. It is a remarkably mis-

chievous animal, destroying every thing which comes in its way—papers, books, goods, &c. It has been known not unfrequently to eat entirely through the middle of a bale of blankets, rendering the whole utterly useless; and like a pet crow carries away every thing it can lay its *hands* on. Even candlesticks, porter-bottles, and large iron axes, being sometimes found in its burrows.”

The food of this species consists of seeds and herbage of various kinds; it devours also the small twigs and leaves of pine trees, and generally has a considerable store of these laid up in the vicinity of its residence.

It is said by DRUMMOND to make its nest in the crevices of high rocks. The nest is large, and is composed of sticks, leaves, and grasses. The abode of this Rat may be discovered by the excrement of the animal, which has the colour and consistence of tar, and is always deposited in the vicinity. It is stated by those who have had the opportunity of observing, that this species produces from three to five young at a time.

GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION.

We were informed by a gentleman who was formerly engaged as a clerk in the service of the Missouri fur company, that this Rat exists in the valleys, and along the sides, of the Rocky Mountains, through an extent of thirty degrees of latitude. DOUGLASS states that it is very numerous near the Mackenzie and Peace rivers, latitude 69°. TOWNSEND found it in Oregon. We have seen a specimen that was said to have been obtained in the Northern mountains of Texas, and have heard of its existence in North California.

Audubon, John James and Bachman, John. 1851. "Neotoma Drummondii, Rocky Mountain Neotoma [Pl. XXIX, winter and summer colours]." *The quadrupeds of North America* 1, 223–226. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.322499>.

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