

## GENUS OVIBOS.—BLAINVILLE.

## DENTAL FORMULA.

$$\text{Incisive } \frac{0}{8}; \text{ Canine } \frac{0-0}{0-0}; \text{ Molar } \frac{6-6}{6-6} = 32.$$

Body, low and compact; legs, short and covered with smooth short hairs; feet, hairy under the heel; forehead, broad and flat; no suborbital sinus; muzzle, blunt and covered with hair; horns, common to both sexes, in contact on the summit of the head, flat, broad, then tapering and bent down against the cheeks, with the points turned up; ears, short, and placed far back; eyes, small; tail, short.

Hair, very abundant, long, and woolly; size and form intermediate between the ox and the sheep; inhabits the northern or Arctic portions of North America.

The generic name is derived from two Latin words—*ovis*, sheep, and *bos*, ox.

There is only one known existing species of this genus, although *fossil* skulls have been found in Siberia, from which the name of *Ovibos pallentis* is given in systematic European works.

## OVIBOS MOSCHATUS.—G M E L.

## MUSK-OX.

## PLATE CXI.—MALES.

O. Fuscescens-niger, cornibus basi approximatis planis, latissimis, deorsum flexis, ad malas appressis apice extrorsum sursumque recurvis; mas magnitudine vaccæ biennis.

## CHARACTERS.

*Adult male, size of a small two year old cow; horns, united on the summit of the head, flat, broad, bent down against the cheeks, with the points turned up. Colour, brownish-black.*

## SYNONYMES.

LE BŒUF MUSQUÉ. M. Jeremie, Voyage au Nord, t. iii. p. 314.

“ “ Charlevoix, Nouv. France, tom. v. p. 194.



- MUSK-OX. Drage, Voyage, vol. ii. p. 260.  
 " Dobbs, Hudson's Bay, pp. 19, 25.  
 " Ellis, Voyage, p. 232.  
 " Pennant, Quadr., vol. i. p. 31.  
 " " Arctic Zoology, vol. i. p. 9.  
 " Hearne's Journey, p. 137.  
 " Parry's First Voyage, p. 257, plate.  
 " " Second Voyage, pp. 497, 503, 512 (specimen in British Museum).  
 BOS MOSCHATUS. Gmel. Syst.  
 " " Capt. Sabine (Parry's First Voyage, Supplement, p. 189).  
 " " Mr. Sabine, Franklin's Journey, p. 668.  
 " " Richardson, Parry's Second Voyage, Appendix, p. 331.  
 OVIBOS MOSCHATUS. Richardson, Fauna Boreali Americana, p. 275.  
 MATAEH-MOOSTOOS (UGLY BISON). Cree Indians.  
 ADGIDDAH-YAWSEH (LITTLE BISON). Chipewyans and Copper Indians.  
 OONINGMAK. Esquimaux.  
 OVIBOS MOSCHATUS. Harlan, Fauna, p. 264.  
 BOS MOSCHATUS—The MUSK-OX. Godman, Nat. Hist. vol. iii. p. 29.

## DESCRIPTION.

Horns, very broad at base, covering the brow and crown of the head, touching each other for their entire basal breadth from the occipital to the frontal region: as the horns rise from their flatly-convex bases they become round and tapering, like those of a common cow, and curve downwards between the eye and the ear to a little below the eye, where they turn upwards and outwards (in a segment of a circle), to a little above the angle of the eye, ending with tolerably sharp points. The horns for half their length are rough, with small longitudinal splinters of unequal length, beyond which they are smooth and rather glossy, like those of a common bull.

Head, large and broad; nose, very obtuse; nostrils, oblong openings inclining towards each other downwards from above; their inner margins naked; united at their base. There is no other vestige of a muzzle; the whole of the nose, and the lips, covered with a short coat of hairs; there is no furrow on the upper lip.

The head, neck, and shoulders are covered with long bushy hair, and there is a quantity of long straight hair on the margins of the mouth and the sides of the lower jaw.

Eyes, moderately large, and the hair immediately around them shorter than on other parts of the cheeks; ears, short, and scarcely visible through the surrounding long hair, which is more or less waved or crimped, and forms a sort of ruff back of the neck; legs, short and thick, clothed with



short hair unmixed with wool ; hoofs, flat, small in proportion to the size of the animal, and resembling those of the reindeer. The cow differs from the bull in having smaller horns (the bases of which, instead of touching each other, are separated by a hairy space), and in the hair on the throat and chest being shorter. The female is considerably smaller than the male.

#### COLOUR.

The general colour of the hair of the body is brown ; on the neck and between the shoulders it is of a grizzled hue, being dull light-brown, fading on the tips into brownish-white ; on the centre of the back it presents a soiled whitish colour, forming a mark which is aptly termed by Captain PARRY the saddle. The hips are dark-brown, and the sides, thighs, and belly, nearly black ; the short soft hairs on the nose and lips are whitish, with a tinge of reddish-brown ; legs, brownish-white ; tips of horns, and hoofs, black ; tail, dark brown.

#### DIMENSIONS.

	Feet.	Inches.
Length from nose to root of tail, about	5	6

#### HABITS.

For our description and account of the habits of this very peculiar animal we have resorted to other authors, never having ourselves had an opportunity of seeing it alive, and in fact knowing it only from the specimen in the British Museum, from which our figures were drawn, and which is the only one hitherto sent to Europe, so difficult is it to procure the animal and convey the skin, with the skull, leg bones, &c., in a tolerable state of preservation, from the barren lands of the northern portions of British America, where it is found, and where an almost perpetual winter and consequent scarcity of food make it very difficult to prevent the Indians, or white hunters either, from eating (we should say devouring) everything that can by any possibility serve to fill their empty stomachs—even skins, hoofs, and the most refuse parts of any animal they kill.

To give a better idea of the effects of hunger on man, at times, in these wild and desert countries, we will relate a case that happened to Dr. RICHARDSON while upon an expedition. One of his men, a half-breed and a bad fellow, it was discovered, had killed a companion with whom he had





Drawn on Stone by W<sup>m</sup> E. Hitchcock





been sent upon a short journey in the woods for intelligence, and had eaten a considerable portion of his miserable victim.

Dr. RICHARDSON, watching this monster from hour to hour, perceived that he was evidently preparing and awaiting an opportunity to kill him, possibly dreading the punishment he deserved for his horrible crime, and perhaps thinking the doctor's body would supply him with food till he could reach the settlements and escape:—anticipating his purpose, the doctor very properly shot him.

Sir JOHN relates an instance in which all his efforts to obtain a skin of the black-tailed deer were baffled by the appetites of his hunters, who ate up one they killed, hide and all. Even on the fertile prairies of more southern portions of our continent, starvation sometimes stares the hunter in the face. At one time a fine specimen of the mule deer (*Cervus macrotis*), shot for us on the prairies far up the Missouri river, was eaten by our men, who concealed the fact of their having killed the animal until some days afterwards.

Sir GEORGE SIMPSON, of the Hudson's Bay Fur Company, most kindly promised some years ago that he would if possible procure us a skin of the Musk-Ox, which he thought could be got within two years—taking one season to send the order for it to his men and another to get it and send the skin to England. We have not yet received this promised skin, and therefore feel sure that the hunters failed to obtain or to preserve one, for during the time that has elapsed we have received from the Hudson's Bay Company, through the kindness of Sir GEORGE, an Arctic fox, preserved in the flesh in rum, and a beautiful skin of the silver-gray fox, which were written for by Sir GEORGE at our request in 1845, at the same time that gentleman wrote for the skin of the Musk-Ox. We give an extract from Sir GEORGE's letter to us: "With reference to your application for skins of the Musk-Ox, I forwarded instructions on the subject to a gentleman stationed at the Hudson's Bay Company's post of Churchill, on Hudson's Bay, but the distance and difficulties of communication are so great that he will not receive my letter until next summer; and he cannot possibly procure the specimens you require before next winter, nor can these be received in England before the month of October, 1847, and it is doubtful that they will be received even then, as those animals are scarce, and so extremely timid that a year might be lost before obtaining one."

Sir GEORGE SIMPSON was pleased to close this letter with a highly complimentary expression of the pleasure it would afford him to assist us in the completion of our work; and among the difficulties and worrying accompaniments of such a publication as ours, it has been an unmixed gratification to have with us the sympathies and assistance of gentlemen



like Sir GEORGE and many others, and of so powerful a corporation as the Hudson's Bay Fur Company.

Dr. RICHARDSON in a note explains a mistake made by PENNANT, who appears to have confounded the habitat of the Musk-Ox with that of the bison and states that our animal is found on the lands of the *Cris* or *Cristinaux* and *Assinibouls*, which are plains extending from the Red river of Lake Winnipeg to the Saskatchewan, on which tracts the buffalo is frequently found, but not the Musk-Ox.

The accounts of old writers, having reference to an animal found in New Mexico, which PENNANT refers to the Musk-Ox, may be based upon the existence of the Rocky Mountain sheep in that country, which having been imperfectly described, has led some authors to think the Musk-Ox was an inhabitant of so southern a locality.

"The country frequented by the Musk-Ox is mostly rocky, and destitute of wood except on the banks of the larger rivers, which are generally more or less thickly clothed with spruce trees. Their food is similar to that of the caribou—grass at one season and lichens at another; and the contents of their paunch are eaten by the natives with the same relish that they devour the '*nerrooks*' of the reindeer. The droppings of the Musk-Ox take the form of round pellets, differing from those of the caribou only in their greater size.

"When this animal is fat, its flesh is well tasted, and resembles that of the caribou, but has a coarser grain. The flesh of the bulls is highly flavoured, and both bulls and cows, when lean, smell strongly of musk, their flesh at the same time being very dark and tough, and certainly far inferior to that of any other ruminating animal existing in North America.

"The carcase of a Musk-Ox weighs, exclusive of the offal, about three hundred weight, or nearly three times as much as a barren ground caribou, and twice as much as one of the woodland caribou.

"Notwithstanding the shortness of the legs of the Musk-Ox, it runs fast, and climbs hills or rocks with great ease. One, pursued on the banks of the Coppermine, scaled a lofty sand cliff, having so great an acclivity that we were obliged to crawl on hands and knees to follow it. Its foot-marks are very similar to those of the caribou, but are rather longer and narrower. These oxen assemble in herds of from twenty to thirty, rut about the end of August and beginning of September, and bring forth one calf about the latter end of May or beginning of June.

"HEARNE, from the circumstance of few bulls being seen, supposed that they kill each other in their contests for the cows. If the hunters keep themselves concealed when they fire upon a herd of Musk-Oxen, the poor animals mistake the noise for thunder, and, forming themselves into a



group, crowd nearer and nearer together as their companions fall around them ; but should they discover their enemies by sight or by their sense of smell, which is very acute, the whole herd seek for safety by instant flight. The bulls, however, are very irascible, and particularly when wounded will often attack the hunter and endanger his life, unless he possess both activity and presence of mind. The Esquimaux, who are well accustomed to the pursuit of this animal, sometimes turn its irritable disposition to good account ; for an expert hunter having provoked a bull to attack him, wheels round it more quickly than it can turn, and by repeated stabs in the belly puts an end to its life. The wool of the Musk-Ox resembles that of the bison, but is perhaps finer, and would no doubt be highly useful in the arts if it could be procured in sufficient quantity.”—*Richardson, F. B. A.*, p. 277.

“The Musk-Oxen killed on Melville Island during PARRY’s visit, were very fat, and their flesh, especially the heart, although highly scented with musk, was considered very good food. When cut up it had all the appearance of beef for the market. HEARNE says that the flesh of the Musk-Ox does not at all resemble that of the bison, but is more like that of the moose, and the fat is of a clear white, tinged with light azure. The young cows and calves furnish a very palatable beef, but that of the old bulls is so intolerably musky as to be excessively disagreeable.”—*Godman*, vol. iii. p. 35.

According to PARRY, this animal weighs about seven hundred pounds. The head and hide weigh about one hundred and thirty pounds. “The horns are employed for various purposes by the Indians and Esquimaux, especially for making cups and spoons. From the long hair growing on the neck and chest the Esquimaux make their musquito wigs, to defend their faces from those troublesome insects. The hide makes good soles for shoes and is much used for that purpose by the Indians.”

#### GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION.

The Musk-Ox resorts to the barren lands of America lying to the north of the 60th parallel of north latitude. HEARNE mentions that he once saw the tracks of one in the neighbourhood of Fort Churchill, lat. 59° ; and in his first journey to the north he saw many in the latitude of 61°. At present, according to what is said, they do not reach the shores of Hudson’s Bay ; farther to the westward they are rarely seen in any number, lower than lat. 67°. RICHARDSON states that he had not heard of their being seen on the banks of Mackenzie’s river to the southward of Great Bear lake. They range over the islands which lie to the north of the American



continent as far as Melville Island, in latitude  $75^{\circ}$ , but they do not extend to Greenland, Lapland, or Spitzbergen. There is an extensive tract of barren country skirting the banks of the Mackenzie river, northwest of the Rocky Mountains, which also is inhabited by the Musk-Ox; it is not known in New Caledonia, on the banks of the Columbia, nor in any portion of the Rocky Mountains; nor does it cross over to the Asiatic shore: consequently it does not exist in any part of northern Asia or Siberia.

Captain PARRY noticed its appearance on Melville Island in the month of May; it must therefore be regarded as an animal the native home of which is within the Arctic Circle, the dwelling-place of the Esquimaux.

#### GENERAL REMARKS.

The Musk-Ox is remarkable amongst the animals of America, for never having had more than one specific appellation, whilst other species of much less interest have been honoured with a long list of synonymes. JEREMIE appears to have given the first notice of it: he brought some of the wool to France, and had stockings made of it which were said to have been more beautiful than silk. The English voyagers of an early period gave some information respecting it, but PENNANT has the merit of being the first who systematically arranged and described it, from the skin of a specimen sent to England by HEARNE, the celebrated traveller. From its want of a naked muzzle and some other peculiarities, M. BLAINVILLE placed it in a genus intermediate (as its name denotes) between the sheep and the ox.





Audubon, John James and Bachman, John. 1854. "Ovibos moschatus, Musk-Ox [Pl. CXI, males]." *The quadrupeds of North America* 3, 46–52.

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