PTEROMYS SABRINUS.—PENNANT

SEVERN RIVER FLYING-SQUIRREL.

PLATE CXLIIL.—FIG. 1.

P. Magnitudine P. volucellum tertia parte excedens; caudâ corpore curtior, patagio lumbari pone carpum in lobum rotundatum excurrente, colore flavescente-cano obscuriore inumbrato.

CHARACTERS.

One third larger than P. volucella; tail, shorter than the body; flying membrane having a small rounded projection behind the wrist. Colour, dull yellow gray, irregularly marked with darker.

SYNONYMES.

GREATER FLYING-SQUIRREL. Forster, Philos. Trans., vol. lxii, p. 379.

SEVERN RIVER FLYING-SQUIRREL. Pennant, Hist. Quad., vol. ii. p. 153.

“ “ “ Arctic Zoology, vol. i. p. 122.

SCIURUS HUDSONIUS. Gmel., Syst., vol. i. p. 153.

“ SABRINUS. Shaw, Zool., vol. ii., part 1, p. 157.

PTEROMYS SABRINUS. Rich., Zool. Jour., No. 12, p. 519.

“ “ “ F. B. A., p. 193.

DESCRIPTION.

Head, short and somewhat rounded; nose, short and obtuse; eyes, large; flying membrane, extending from the wrist to the middle of the hind-leg, nearly straight, having only a slight rounded projection close to the wrist; tail, depressed, slightly convex on its upper surface, but quite flat, or even somewhat concave, beneath; it is broadest about an inch from the body, and then tapers gradually but very slightly towards the extremity, which is rounded; the flattened form of the tail, and its distichous arrangement, is given to it in consequence of the fur on its sides being much longer than that on its upper surface; the extremities are small; the fore-legs connected with the flying membrane down to the wrist; the feet are hairy both above and below. There are four short toes on the fore-feet, and the claws are small, compressed, curved, and sharp pointed;

under their roots there is a compressed callous space, projecting from the end of each toe, and there is a callosity in place of a thumb, armed with a very minute nail.

There are five hind toes ; the claws resemble those of the fore feet, and are almost concealed by the hair of the toes ; the soles are covered with a dense brush, like the feet of a rabbit or hare. The fur is soft, long, and silky on all parts.

COLOUR.

Incisors, deep orange ; whiskers, black ; a dark gray marking around the eye. The hairs on the upper surface of the head and body are of a deep blackish-gray colour from the roots to near the tips, which are pale reddish-brown, but distinctly presented only when the fur lies smoothly ; on the flying membrane the colour is a shade darker in consequence of the under colour not being concealed by the lighter colour of the tips ; the outer surfaces of the feet are pale bluish-gray ; the margins of the mouth, sides of the nose, cheeks, and whole ventral aspect of the body, white, with a tinge of buff under the belly, and particularly under the flying membrane. Tail, nearly the colour of the back, with an intermixture however of black hairs ; beneath, it is buff ; hair on the soles, yellowish-white.

DIMENSIONS.

	Inches.	Lines.
Length of head and body, - - - - -	8	
Tail, including fur, - - - - -	5	9
Height of ear, - - - - -		5½
Heel to end of claw, - - - - -	1	5½
Longest hind-toe and nail, - - - - -		4½
Fore-toe and nail, - - - - -		5

HABITS.

We found this interesting Flying-Squirrel in abundance at Quebec, and many of them were offered for sale in the markets of that city during our sojourn there. It appears indeed to take the place of the common small Flying-Squirrel of the United States (*P. volucella*) in Lower Canada, where we did not observe the latter east of Montreal.

We heard that one of these pretty animals was caught alive by a soldier who saw it on the plains of Abraham, and ran it down.

A brood of young of this species, along with the mother was kept in

confinement by an acquaintance of ours, for about four months, and the little ones, five in number, were suckled in the following manner: the younglings stood on the ground floor of the cage, whilst the mother hung her body downwards, and secured herself from falling by clinging to the perch immediately above her head by her fore-feet. This was observed every day, and some days as frequently as eight or ten times.

This brood was procured as follows: a piece of partially cleared wood having been set on fire, the labourers saw the Flying-Squirrel start from a hollow stump with a young one in her mouth, and watched the place where she deposited it, in another stump at a little distance. The mother returned to her nest, and took away another and another in succession, until all were removed, when the wood-cutters went to the abode now occupied by the affectionate animal, and caught *her* already *singed* by the fire, and her five young unscathed.

After some time a pair of the young were given away to a friend. The three remaining ones, as well as the mother, were killed in the following manner:

The cage containing them was hung near the window, and one night during the darkness, a rat, or rats (*mus decumanus*), caught hold of the three young through the bars, and ate off all their flesh, leaving the skins almost entire, and the heads remaining inside the bars. The mother had had her thigh broken and her flesh eaten from the bone, and yet this good parent was so affectionately attached to her brood that when she was found in this pitiable condition in the morning, she was clinging to her offspring, and trying to nurse them as if they had still been alive.

This species is said to bear a considerable resemblance to the European Flying-Squirrel. It was first described by FORSTER, who not having distinguished it from the European animal, PENNANT stands as its discoverer.

We did not observe any of these Flying-Squirrels on the borders of the Yellow Stone or Upper Missouri, and have no further information as to their habits.

In our first volume (pp. 134, 135), we mentioned that Sir JOHN RICHARDSON speaks of a Flying-Squirrel which he considered a variety of *P. sabrinus*, and called *var. B. alpinus*. We then remarked that we hoped to be able to identify that variety when presenting an account of the habits of *P. sabrinus*, and in our next article shall have the pleasure of doing so, having named it *P. alpinus*.

GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION.

The northern range of this species is about latitude 52°; it has been

Fig 1

Fig 2

On Stone by W^m E. Hatch del.

Fig 1. *Severn River Flying Squirrel*

Fig 2. *Rocky Mountain Flying Squirrel*

captured on the shores of Lake Huron, and at the bottom of James Bay, at Moose Factory. We obtained specimens in the neighbourhood of Quebec, where in the autumn they were exceedingly abundant.

We have not a doubt it is found in the United States south of the river St. Lawrence, but at present have no evidence to that effect. It does not appear to exist on either slope of the Rocky Mountains, nor have we in fact been able to find any of our smaller Rodentia of the Atlantic States in those regions.

GENERAL REMARKS.

As long as only two species of Flying-Squirrel were known in North America—the present species (*P. sabrinus*) and the little *P. volucella*—there was no difficulty in deciding on the species, but since others have been discovered in the far west, the task of separating and defining them has become very perplexing. We will however endeavour, in our next article, in which we shall describe *P. alpinus*, to point out those characters which may enable naturalists to distinguish the closely allied species.

Audubon, John James and Bachman, John. 1854. "Pteromys sabrinus, Severn-River Flying-Squirrel, [Pl. CXLIII]." *The quadrupeds of North America* 3, 202–205. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.322521>.

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