

# PUTORIUS FUSCUS.—AUD. and BACH.

TAWNY WEASEL.

PLATE CXLVIII. MALE.

P. Corpore inter putorius erminius et P. vulgaris intermedio ; caudâ illius brevior, sed hujus longior ; apice nigro ; vellere supra fusco ; subtus albo.

## CHARACTERS.

*Intermediate in size between the ermine and the common weasel of Europe ; tail, shorter than in the former, but longer than in the latter, with the extremity black ; body, brown above, white beneath.*

## SYNONYMES.

MUSTELA FUSCA. Aud. and Bach., Jour. Acad. Nat. Sci. Phil., October 5, 1841, p. 94.  
 “ “ DeKay, Nat. Hist. State of New York, p. 35.

## DESCRIPTION.

Body and neck, rather short in proportion to others of this genus, and far more robust than the common European Weasel. The feet especially appear a third larger, and are more thickly clothed with fur, which covers the palms and toes, and conceals the nails completely ; ears, a little longer and more pointed than those of either the ermine or common Weasel.

In writing this description we have several specimens of the European common Weasel (*P. vulgaris*) before us, and the ends of the tails in that species are uniformly brown, with here and there a black hair interspersed. Although the hair of the present species is black at the extremity of the tail, like that of the ermine, yet these hairs are short and soft, and more like long fur, and do not present the long and coarse appearance of those of the latter species, but lie closer along the vertebræ, and form a sharp point at the extremity.

Claws, short and stout ; incisors equally large with those of the ermine, but shorter ; ears, large, obtusely pointed at tip, and thinly clothed with short adpressed hairs ; tail, cylindrical, and narrowed down to a point of fine hairs, the tip somewhat resembling a large water-colour pencil or brush. Whiskers, as long as the head, and rather numerous. The hairs on the





On Stone by Wm E. Hitchcock

Drawn from Nature by J.W. Audubon

*Fanny Hesel.*

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body are of two kinds: the longer hairs are a little more rigid, and far more numerous, than on the ermine, and the under fur is a little longer, coarser, and less woolly than the fur of the latter animal.

## COLOUR.

The whole upper surface, sides, outside of legs, feet, ears, and tail to within an inch of the extremity, uniform tawny brown, except on the centre of the back and top of the tail, where the colouring darkens. Thus the body of the animal is a shade darker than the summer colour of the ermine, while the colour of the tail is, for about an inch, nearly as black as in that species. The white on the lower surface is not mixed with brown hairs as in *Putorius vulgaris*, and not only occupies a broader space on the belly, but extends along the inner surface of the thighs as low as the tarsus, whilst in *P. vulgaris* the white scarcely reaches the thighs. The whole of the under surface is pure white; this colour does not commence on the upper lip, as is generally the case in the ermine, but on the chin, extending around the edges of the mouth, and by a well defined line along the neck, inner parts of the fore-legs, and inner parts of the thighs, tapering off to a point nearly opposite the heel on the hind-legs.

Whiskers, dark-brown, with a few white ones interspersed. The specimen from which our figure was drawn, was captured on Long Island in May 1834, and is therefore in summer pelage.

## DIMENSIONS.

For the sake of convenient comparison we will also here give the dimensions of the two species of Weasel to which our animal is most nearly allied, taken from specimens now before us.

|                              | <i>P. fuscus.</i> |        | <i>P. erminea.</i> |        | <i>P. vulgaris.</i> |        |
|------------------------------|-------------------|--------|--------------------|--------|---------------------|--------|
|                              | Inches.           | Lines. | Inches.            | Lines. | Inches.             | Lines. |
| Length of head and body, -   | 9                 | 0      | 11                 | 7      | 7                   | 0      |
| “ tail (vertebræ), -         | 2                 | 9      | 4                  | 6      | 1                   | 9      |
| “ “ (including fur),         | 3                 | 2      | 6                  | 2      | 2                   | 1      |
| Height of ear posteriorly, - |                   | 3      |                    | 2½     |                     | 2      |

## HABITS.

We find from our notes, that in the State of New York in the winter of 1808, we kept a Weasel, which we suppose may have been this species, in confinement, together with several young ermines. The latter all became



white in winter, but the former underwent no change in colour, remaining brown. On another occasion a specimen of a brown Weasel was brought to us in the month of December. At that season the ermines are invariably white. We cannot after the lapse of so many years say with certainty whether these specimens of Weasels that were brown in winter were those of the smaller, *Putorius pusillus*, or the present species; although we believe from our recollection of the size they were the latter. We therefore feel almost warranted in saying that this species does not change colour in winter.

We were in the habit of substituting our American Weasels for the European ferrets, in driving out the gray rabbit (*Lepus sylvaticus*) from the holes to which that species usually resorts in the northern States, when pursued by dogs (see vol. i. p. 59). Whilst the ermines seemed to relish this amusement vastly, the brown Weasel refused to enter the holes, and we concluded that the latter was the least courageous animal.

On one occasion we saw six or seven young Weasels dug out by dogs from under the roots of a tree in a swamp, which we believe to have been of this species.

#### GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION.

The specimens which we have seen of this animal all came from different parts of the State of New York. We have however heard of the existence of a Weasel which is brown in winter in the States of Ohio and Michigan, which we have reason to believe is the present species.

#### GENERAL REMARKS.

Our early writers on natural history were under the impression that we had but one, or at farthest two species of Weasel in our country.

GODMAN supposed that there was but one Weasel in North America, and that it was the common Weasel in summer, but was the ermine in summer pelage, turning white in winter. HARLAN gave DESMAREST's description of the European *Mustela vulgaris*, supposing that animal to exist in our country.

RICHARDSON gave two species as belonging to North America, one of which he supposed to be identical with the common Weasel of Europe. It is now ascertained that we have at least five species in the United States, four of which are found in the State of New York.



Audubon, John James and Bachman, John. 1854. "Putorius fuscus, Tawny Weasel [Pl. CXLVIII, male]." *The quadrupeds of North America* 3, 234–236.  
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