On Stone by Wm. H. Woodcock

Drawn from Nature by J. W. Audubon

Black-footed Ferret

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PUTORIUS NIGRIPES.—AUD. AND BACH.

BLACK-FOOTED FERRET.

PLATE XCIII.—MALE.

P. Magnitudine mustelam martem equans, fronte, caudæ, apice, pedibusque nigris; supra e flavido fuscus infra albus.

CHARACTERS.

Size of the pine marten; forehead, feet, and extremity of tail, black; yellowish-brown above, white beneath.

SYNONYME.

PUTORIUS NIGRIPES. Aud. and Bach, Quadrupeds of North America. vol. 2, pl. 93.

DESCRIPTION.

In its dentition this species possesses all the characteristics belonging to putorius and from the number and disposition of the teeth, cannot be placed in the genus, *mustela*. The canine teeth are stout and rather long, extending beyond the lips; they are slightly arched and somewhat blunt; the two outer incisors in the upper jaw are largest, the remainder are smaller, but regular and conspicuous. The first false molar is small but distinctly visible, it is without a lobe; the second is larger and has a slight lobe on each side. The great tuberculous tooth has two points and an external lobe; the last molar is rather small. In the lower jaw the incisors are small, and much crowded together. The three false molars on each side increase in size from the first, which is smallest and simple, to the third, which is largest and tuberculated. The great internal tooth has three lobes but no tubercle on the inner side, as is the case in the genus *mustela*; the last, or back tooth, is small but simple.

Body, very long; head, blunt; forehead, arched and broad; muzzle, short; eyes, of medium size; moustaches, few; ears, short, erect, broad at base, and triangular in shape, clothed on both surfaces with short hair; neck, long; legs, short and stout; toes, armed with sharp nails, very slightly arched; the feet on both surfaces covered with hair even to the soles, concealing the nails.

The pelage is of two kinds of hair, it is short soft and very fine, the outer and interspersed hairs are not so fine, but are not long and very coarse. The fur is finer than that of the mink or pine marten, and even shorter than that of the ermine. The hairs below the ears, under the forearms and belly are the coarsest; the tail is cylindrical, and less voluminous than that of the mink, containing more coarse hair, and less fine fur, than in that animal.

COLOUR.

The long hairs on the back are at the roots whitish, with a yellowish tinge, broadly tipped with reddish-brown; the soft under fur is white, with a yellowish tinge, giving the animal on the back a yellowish-brown appearance, in some parts approaching to rufous; on the sides and rump the colour is a little lighter, gradually fading into yellowish-white. Whiskers, white and black; nose, ears, sides of face, throat, under surface of neck, belly, and under surface of tail, white, a shade of brownish on the chest between the forelegs. There is a broad black patch commencing on the forehead, enclosing the eyes, and running down within a few lines of the point of the nose; outer and inner surfaces of the legs, to near the shoulders and hips, black, with a tinge of brownish; the tip of the tail is black, for two inches from the extremity.

DIMENSIONS.

					Feet.	Inches.
From point of nose to root of tail,	-	-	-	-	1	7
“ “ Tail, (vertebræ)	-	-	-	-		4
“ head to end of hairs	-	-	-	-		5 $\frac{1}{4}$
Height of ear posteriorly,	-	-	-	-		$\frac{1}{2}$
From shoulder to end of fore leg,	-	-	-	-		4

HABITS.

It is with great pleasure that we introduce this handsome new species; it was procured by Mr. CULBERTSON on the lower waters of the Platte River, and inhabits the wooded parts of the country to the Rocky Mountains, and perhaps is found beyond that range, although not observed by any travellers, from LEWIS and CLARK to the present day. When we consider the very rapid manner in which every expedition that has crossed the Rocky Mountains, has been pushed forward, we cannot wonder that many species have been entirely overlooked, and should rather be surprised at the number noticed by LEWIS and CLARK, and by

NUTALL, TOWNSEND, and others. There has never yet been a Government expedition properly organized, and sent forth to obtain *all* the details, which such a party, allowed *time* enough for thorough investigation, would undoubtedly bring back, concerning the natural history and natural resources of the regions of the far west. The nearest approach to such an expedition having been that so well conducted by LEWIS and CLARK. Nor do we think it at all probable that Government will attend to such matters for a long time to come. We must therefore hope that private enterprise will gradually unfold the zoological, botanical, and mineral wealth of the immense territories we own but do not yet occupy.

The habits of this species resemble, as far as we have learned, those of the ferret of Europe. It feeds on birds, small reptiles and animals, eggs, and various insects, and is a bold and cunning foe to the rabbits, hares, grouse, and other game of our western regions.

The specimen from which we made our drawing was received by us from Mr. J. G. BELL, to whom it was forwarded from the outskirts or outposts of the fur traders on the Platte river, by Mr. CULBERTSON. It was stuffed with the wormwood so abundant in parts of that country, and was rather a poor specimen, although in tolerable preservation. We shall have occasion in a future article to thank Mr. BELL for the use of other new specimens, this being only one of several instances of his kind services to us, and the zoology of our country, in this way manifested.

GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION.

As before stated, the specimen which we have figured and described was obtained on the lower waters of the Platte river. We are not aware that another specimen exists in any cabinet

Audubon, John James and Bachman, John. 1851. "Putorius nigripes, Black-footed Ferret [Pl. XCIII, male]." *The quadrupeds of North America* 2, 297–299. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.322528>.

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