On Stone by W. E. Hitchcock

Drawn from Nature by J. W. Audubon

Large-tailed Spermophile

Lith. Printed & Col^d by J. T. Bowen, Phil

SPERMOPHILUS MACROURUS.—BENNETT.

LARGE-TAILED SPERMOPHILE.

PLATE CXXXIX.—MALE.

S. Magnitudine Sciurum cinereum adequans, vellere crassiusculo, in dorso lateribusque cinereo nigroque vario, cauda corporis longitudine, mediocriter comosa.

CHARACTERS.

Size of the cat-squirrel (Sciurus cinereus); fur, rather coarse; body, mottled with black, and ashy white, forming irregular interrupted narrow transverse bars on the back and sides; tail, as long as the body, and moderately bushy.

SYNONYMES.

SPERMOPHILUS MACROURUS. Bennett, Proc. Zool. Soc., 1833, p. 41.

LONG-TAILED MARMOT. Zool. Soc. Catalogue, No. 456.

SCIURUS LUPTUS. Named in the Museum of the Jardin des Plantes, but not described.

DESCRIPTION.

This animal is shaped very much like a squirrel, although the ears are farther back in the head and the body is stouter than in that genus. Head, of moderate size, round, and elongated; nose, somewhat pointed; ears, large, broad, and ovate towards the points; feet, stout; nails, long, sharp, and considerably arched; tail, rounded, possessing none of the distichous arrangement of the tails of squirrels; tarsi, naked beneath; fur, moderately long, and rather coarse and harsh to the touch.

COLOUR.

Hairs of the back, blackish-gray at the base, annulated with white, or brownish-white, towards the tips, which are black; crown of the head, pure black; muzzle, rufous brown above, whitish on the sides; a narrow whitish space around the eyes; on the lower part of the cheeks and on the throat the hairs are brownish-white; cheeks, grizzled black and white; ears, internally covered with short hairs and partly coloured on the inner

surface with dusky and soiled yellow; on the outside they are blackish-brown, becoming paler and grizzled towards the margins; feet, whitish, finely freckled with dusky markings, their general hue pale; tail, moderately bushy and sub-depressed; the hairs are long, varying from one and three quarters to two inches in length; they are of a brownish-white colour and are annulated by three broad black rings, the annulations nearest the apex of each hair considerably broader than the others. Upper and lower incisors, pale yellow; whiskers, black; claws, brown.

In the specimen here described the whole crown of the head is black, but we are informed by our friend WATERHOUSE that an imperfect skin of a second specimen which exists in the museum of the Zoological Society of London has the crown of the head gray.

DIMENSIONS.

	Foot.	Inches.	Lines.
Length from point of nose to root of tail, - - - - -	1	1	
“ of tail (vertebræ), - - - - -		7	9
“ “ (including hair), - - - - -		10	
“ from nose to ear, - - - - -		2	5
Height of ear, - - - - -			6
Heel to end of claws, - - - - -		2	5
Length of nail of middle hind-toe, - - - - -			4½
“ fore-foot and nails, - - - - -		1	6
“ nail of middle toe of fore-foot, - - - - -			4½

HABITS.

Spermophilus Macrourus is an active and sprightly fellow, readily ascending trees on occasion, and feeding on nuts as well as seeds, roots, and grasses.

This species is in some districts rather numerous, and when in the rainy season some of the low grounds are submerged, takes to the trees, and sometimes curious fights occur between it and the wood-peckers. Five or six of the latter will on observing the Spermophile, unite against him, and cutting about in the air, peck at him as they dart swiftly around the persecuted animal, which is lucky if a hollow into which he can retreat be near, and frequently indeed the wood-peckers' holes are entered by him, but the angry and noisy birds still keep up their cries and fly with fury at the hole, and although they can no longer peck the animal they keep him in a state of siege for a considerable time.

The origin of this animosity may be the fact of the Spermophile (as well

as many kinds of squirrels) sometimes turning out the wood-peckers from their nests, an injury which unites them against the wrong-doer. By what process the birds are influenced to attack when the animal is not in their nests, nor even on a tree upon which they have built (or dug, we should say), we know not, but that the birds comprehend that union is strength is quite evident, and the *Spermophile* knows it too, for he always instantly tries to escape and conceal himself as soon as the vociferous cries of the first bird that observes him are heard, and before its neighbours called thereby to the fight can reach the spot.

We have not been able to ascertain how many young this *Spermophile* produces at a birth, nor at what season they are brought forth. It is seen on the plains and in localities where no trees grow, in which places it burrows or runs into holes in the rocks.

From our present information we are inclined to think that this species is sometimes in company with *S. Douglasii* in California, or at least inhabits the same districts.

GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION.

This *Spermophile* exists in some portions of that part of Mexico which were traversed by J. W. AUDUBON on his way towards California, and is also found in the last named State.

GENERAL REMARKS.

This species somewhat resembles *Spermophilus Douglasii*, but is a larger animal, the white patches over the shoulders moreover are wanting. The heel is hairy beneath, but the remaining part of the under surface of the foot is naked, whilst in *Spermophilus Douglasii* the whole foot is covered with hair beneath, up to the fleshy parts at the base of the toes.

Audubon, John James and Bachman, John. 1854. "Spermophilus macrourus, Large-tailed Spermophile [Pl. CXXXIX, male]." *The quadrapeds of North America* 3, 181–183. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.322583>.

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