the same by W. L. H. H. H. H.

Drawn from Nature by J. W. Audubon

Lith. Francis & Co. of J. T. Bowen, Phila.

American Black Bear

URSUS AMERICANUS.—PALLAS.

AMERICAN BLACK BEAR.

PLATE CXLI.—MALE and FEMALE.

U. Naso fere in eadem linea cum fronte, convexiore quam in U. ferox ; plantis palmisque brevissimis, colore nigro vel fuscescente-nigro, lateribus rostri fulvis.

CHARACTERS.

Nose, nearly in a line with the forehead, more arched than in Ursus ferox ; palms and soles of the feet, very short ; colour, black, or brownish-black ; there is a yellowish patch on each side of the nose.

SYNONYMES.

- BLACK BEAR. Pennant, Arctic Zoology, p. 57, and Introduction, p. 120.
 “ “ Pennant's History of Quadrupeds, vol. ii. p. 11.
 “ “ Warden's United States, vol. i. p. 195.
 URSUS AMERICANUS. Pallas, Spicil. Zool., vol. xiv. pp. 6-24.
 “ “ Harlan, Fauna, p. 51.
 “ “ Godman's Natural History, vol. i. p. 194.
 “ “ Rich., Fauna Boreali Americana, p. 14.
 “ “ DeKay, Nat. Hist. State of New York, p. 24, pl. 6, fig. 1.

DESCRIPTION.

The Black Bear is commonly smaller than the Grizzly Bear. Body and legs, thick and clumsy in appearance ; head, short, and broad where it joins the neck ; nose, slightly arched, and somewhat pointed ; eyes, small, and close to each other ; ears, high, oval, and rounded at the tips ; palms and soles of the feet, short when compared with those of the Grizzly Bear ; the hairs of the feet project slightly beyond the claws ; tail, very short ; claws, short, blunt, and somewhat incurved ; fur, long, straight, shining, and rather soft.

COLOUR.

Cheeks, yellow, which colour extends from the tip of the nose on both sides of the mouth to near the eye ; in some individuals there is a small

spot of the same tint in front of the eye, and in others a white line commencing on the nose reaches to each side of the angle of the mouth; in a few specimens this white line continues over the cheek to a large white space mixed with a slight fawn colour, covering the whole of the throat, whence a narrow line of the fawn colour descends upon the breast. The hairs on the whole body are in most specimens glossy black; in some we examined they were brown, while a few of the skins we have seen were light brown or dingy yellow. From this last mentioned variety doubtless originated the names Cinnamon Bear, Yellow Bear of Carolina, &c. The outer edges of the ears are brownish-black; eyes and nails, black.

DIMENSIONS.

A very large specimen.

	Feet.	Inches.
From nose to root of tail, - - - - -	6	5
Height to top of shoulder, - - - - -	3	1

A larger Bear than the above may sometimes be captured, but the general size is considerably less.

HABITS.

The Black Bear, however clumsy in appearance, is active, vigilant, and persevering, possesses great strength, courage, and address, and undergoes with little injury the greatest fatigues and hardships in avoiding the pursuit of the hunter. Like the deer it changes its haunts with the seasons, and for the same reason, viz. the desire of obtaining suitable food, or of retiring to the more inaccessible parts, where it can pass the time in security, unobserved by man, the most dangerous of its enemies.

During the spring months it searches for food in the low rich alluvial lands that border the rivers, or by the margins of such inland lakes as, on account of their small size, are called by us ponds. There it procures abundance of succulent roots and tender juicy plants, upon which it chiefly feeds at that season. During the summer heat, it enters the gloomy swamps, passes much of its time in wallowing in the mud like a hog, and contents itself with crayfish, roots, and nettles, now and then seizing on a pig, or perhaps a sow, a calf, or even a full-grown cow. As soon as the different kinds of berries which grow on the mountains begin to ripen, the Bears betake themselves to the high grounds, followed by their cubs.

In retired parts of the country, where the plantations are large and the population sparse, it pays visits to the corn-fields, which it ravages for a while. After this, the various species of nuts, acorns, grapes, and other

forest fruits, that form what in the western States is called *mast*, attract its attention. The Bear is then seen rambling singly through the woods to gather this harvest, not forgetting, meanwhile, to rob every *bee-tree* it meets with, Bears being expert at this operation.

The Black Bear is a capital climber, and now and then *houses* itself in the hollow trunk of some large tree for weeks together during the winter, when it is said to live by sucking its paws.

At one season, the Bear may be seen examining the lower part of the trunk of a tree for several minutes with much attention, at the same time looking around, and snuffing the air. It then rises on its hind-legs, approaches the trunk, embraces it with the fore-legs, and scratches the bark with its teeth and claws for several minutes in continuance. Its jaws clash against each other until a mass of foam runs down on both sides of the mouth. After this it continues its rambles.

The female Black Bear generally brings forth two cubs at a time, although, as we have heard, the number is sometimes three or four. The period of gestation is stated to be from six to seven weeks, but is mentioned as one hundred days by some authors. When born the young are exceedingly small, and if we may credit the accounts of hunters with whom we have conversed on the subject, are not larger than kittens. They are almost invariably brought forth in some well concealed den, or great hollow tree, and so cautious is the dam in selecting her place of accouchment, that it is extremely difficult to discover it, and consequently very rarely that either the female or her cubs are seen until the latter have obtained a much larger size than when born, are able to follow their dam, and can climb trees with facility.

Most writers on the habits of this animal have stated that the Black Bear does not eat animal food from choice, and never unless pressed by hunger. This we consider a great mistake, for in our experience we have found the reverse to be the case, and it is well known to our frontier farmers that this animal is a great destroyer of pigs, hogs, calves, and sheep, for the sake of which we have even known it to desert the pecan groves in Texas. At the same time, as will have been seen by our previous remarks, its principal food generally consists of berries, roots, and other vegetable substances. It is very fond also of fish, and during one of our expeditions to Maine and New Brunswick, we found the inhabitants residing near the coast unwilling to eat the flesh of the animal on account of its fishy taste. In our western forests, however, the Bear feeds on so many nuts and well tasted roots and berries, that its meat is considered a great delicacy, and in the city of New York we have generally found its market price three or four times more than the best beef per pound. The

fore-paw of the Bear when cooked presents a striking resemblance to the hand of a child or young person, and we have known some individuals to be hoaxed by its being represented as such.

Perhaps the most acrid vegetable eaten by the Bear is the Indian turnip (*Arum triphyllum*), which is so pungent that we have seen people almost distracted by it, when they had inadvertently put a piece in their mouth.

The Black Bear is a remarkably swift runner when first alarmed, although it is generally "treed," that is, forced to ascend a tree, when pursued by dogs and hunters on horseback. We were, not very long since, when on an expedition in the mountains of Virginia, leisurely making our way along a road through the forest after a long hunt for deer and turkeys, with our gun thrown behind our shoulders and our arms resting on each end of it, when, although we had been assured there were no Bears in that neighbourhood, we suddenly perceived one above us on a little acclivity at one side of the road, where it was feeding, and nearly concealed by the bushes. The bank was only about fifteen feet high, and the Bear not more than twenty paces from us, so we instantly disengaged our gun, and cocking both barrels, expected to "fill our bag" at one shot, but at the instant and before we could fire, the Bear, with a celerity that astonished us, disappeared. We rushed up the bank and found the land on the top nearly level for a long distance before us, and neither very thickly wooded nor very bushy; but no Bear was to be seen, although our eye could penetrate the woods for at least two hundred yards. After the first disappointing glance around, we thought Bruin might have mounted a tree, but such was not the case, as on looking everywhere nothing could be seen of his black body, and we were obliged to conclude that he had run out of sight in the brief space of time we occupied in ascending the little bank.

As we were once standing at the foot of a large sycamore tree on the borders of a long and deep pond, on the edge of which, in our rear, there was a thick and extensive "cane-brake," we heard a rushing roaring noise, as if some heavy animal was bearing down and passing rapidly through the canes, directly towards us. We were not kept long in suspense, for in an instant or two, a large Bear dashed out of the dense cane, and plunging into the pond without having even seen us, made off with considerable speed through the water towards the other shore. Having only bird-shot in our gun we did not think it worth while to call his attention to us by firing at him, but turned to the cane-brake, expecting to hear either dogs or men approaching shortly. No further noise could be heard, however, and the surrounding woods were as still as before this adventure. We supposed the Bear had been started at some distance, and that his pursuers

not being able to follow him through the almost impenetrable canes, had given up the hunt.

Being one night sleeping in the house of a friend who was a Planter in the State of Louisiana, we were awakened by a servant bearing a light, who gave us a note, which he said his master had just received. We found it to be a communication from a neighbour, requesting our host and ourself to join him as soon as possible, and assist in killing some Bears at that moment engaged in destroying his corn. We were not long in dressing, and on entering the parlour, found our friend equipped. The overseer's horn was heard calling up the negroes. Some were already saddling our horses, whilst others were gathering all the cur-dogs of the plantation. All was bustle. Before half an hour had elapsed, four stout negro men, armed with axes and knives, and mounted on strong nags, were following us at a round gallop through the woods, as we made directly for the neighbour's plantation.

The night was none of the most favourable, a drizzling rain rendering the atmosphere thick and rather sultry; but as we were well acquainted with the course, we soon reached the house, where the owner was waiting our arrival. There were now three of us armed with guns, half a dozen servants, and a good pack of dogs of all kinds. We jogged on towards the detached field in which the Bears were at work. The owner told us that for some days several of these animals had visited his corn, and that a negro who was sent every afternoon to see at what part of the enclosure they entered, had assured him there were at least five in the field that night. A plan of attack was formed: the bars at the usual entrance of the field were to be put down without noise; the men and dogs were to divide, and afterwards proceed so as to surround the Bears, when, at the sounding of our horns, every one was to charge towards the centre of the field, and shout as loudly as possible, which it was judged would so intimidate the animals as to induce them to seek refuge upon the dead trees with which the field was still partially covered.

The plan succeeded: the horns sounded, the horses galloped forward, the men shouted, the dogs barked and howled. The shrieks of the negroes were enough to frighten a legion of bears, and by the time we reached the middle of the field we found that several had mounted the trees, and having lighted fires, we now saw them crouched at the junction of the larger branches with the trunks. Two were immediately shot down. They were cubs of no great size, and being already half dead, were quickly dispatched by the dogs.

We were anxious to procure as much sport as possible, and having observed one of the Bears, which from its size we conjectured to be the

mother of the two cubs just killed, we ordered the negroes to cut down the tree on which it was perched, when it was intended the dogs should have a tug with it, while we should support them, and assist in preventing the Bear from escaping, by wounding it in one of the hind-legs. The surrounding woods now echoed to the blows of the axemen. The tree was large and tough, having been girded more than two years, and the operation of felling it seemed extremely tedious. However, at length it began to vibrate at each stroke; a few inches alone now supported it, and in a short time it came crashing to the ground.

The dogs rushed to the charge, and harassed the Bear on all sides, whilst we surrounded the poor animal. As its life depended upon its courage and strength, it exercised both in the most energetic manner. Now and then it seized a dog and killed him by a single stroke. At another time, a well administered blow of one of its fore-legs sent an assailant off, yelping so piteously that he might be looked upon as *hors du combat*. A cur had daringly ventured to seize the Bear by the snout, and was seen hanging to it, covered with blood, whilst several others scrambled over its back. Now and then the infuriated animal was seen to cast a revengeful glance at some of the party, and we had already determined to dispatch it, when, to our astonishment, it suddenly shook off all the dogs, and before we could fire, charged upon one of the negroes, who was mounted on a pied horse. The Bear seized the steed with teeth and claws, and clung to its breast. The terrified horse snorted and plunged. The rider, an athletic young man and a capital horseman, kept his seat, although only saddled on a sheep-skin tightly girthed, and requested his master not to fire at the Bear. Notwithstanding his coolness and courage, our anxiety for his safety was raised to the highest pitch, especially when in a moment we saw rider and horse come to the ground together; but we were instantly relieved on witnessing the masterly manner in which SCIPIO dispatched his adversary, by laying open his skull with a single well directed blow of his axe, when a deep growl announced the death of the Bear.

In our country no animal, perhaps, has been more frequently the theme of adventure or anecdote than the Bear, and in some of our southwestern States it is not uncommon to while away the winter evenings with Bear stories that are not only interesting on account of the traits of the habits of the animal with which they are interspersed, but from the insight they afford the listener into the characteristics of the bold and hardy huntsmen of those parts.

In the State of Maine the lumbermen (wood-cutters) and the farmers set guns to kill this animal, which are arranged in this way: A funnel-shaped

space about five feet long is formed by driving strong sticks into the ground in two converging lines, leaving both the ends open, the narrow end being wide enough to admit the muzzle of an old musket, and the other extremity so broad as to allow the head and shoulders of the Bear to enter. The gun is then loaded and fastened securely so as to deliver its charge facing the wide end of the enclosure. A round and smooth stick is now placed behind the stock of the gun, and a cord leading from the trigger passed around it, the other end of which, with a piece of meat or a bird tied to it (an owl is a favourite bait), is stretched in front of the gun, so far that the Bear can reach the bait with his paw. Upon his pulling the meat towards him, the string draws the trigger and the animal is instantly killed.

On the coast of Labrador we observed the Black Bear catching fish with great dexterity, and the food of these animals in that region consisted altogether of the fishes they seized in the edge of the water inside the surf. Like the Polar Bear, the present species swims with ease and rapidity, and it is a difficult matter to catch a full grown Bear with a skiff, and a dangerous adventure to attempt its capture in a canoe, which it could easily upset.

We were once enjoying a fine autumnal afternoon on the shores of the beautiful Ohio, with two acquaintances who had accompanied us in quest of some swallows that had built in a high sandy bank, when we observed three hunters about the middle of the river in a skiff, vigorously rowing, the steersman paddling too, with all his strength, in pursuit of a Bear which, about one hundred and fifty yards ahead of them, was cleaving the water and leaving a widening wake behind him on its unrippled surface as he made for the shore, directly opposite to us. We all rushed down to the water at this sight, and launching a skiff we then kept for fishing, hastily put off to intercept the animal, which we hoped to assist in capturing. Both boats were soon nearing the Bear, and we, standing in the bow of our skiff, commenced the attack by discharging a pistol at his head. At this he raised one paw, brushed it across his forehead, and then seemed to redouble his efforts. Repeated shots from both boats were now fired at him, and we ran alongside, thinking to haul his carcase triumphantly on board; but suddenly, to our dismay, he laid both paws on the gunwale of the skiff, and his great weight brought the side for an instant under water, so that we expected the boat would fill and sink. There was no time to be lost: we all threw our weight on to the other side, to counterpoise that of the animal, and commenced a pell-mell battery on him with the oars and a boat-hook; the men in the other boat also attacked him, and driving the bow of their skiff close to his head, one of them laid his skull open with

an axe, which killed him instanter. We jointly hurraed, and tying a rope round his neck, towed him ashore behind our boats.

The Black Bear is very tenacious of life, and like its relative, the Grizzly Bear, is dangerous when irritated or wounded. It makes large beds of leaves and weeds or grasses, in the fissures of rocks, or sleeps in hollow logs, when no convenient den can be found in its neighbourhood; it also makes lairs in the thick cane-brakes and deep swamps, and covers itself with a heap of leaves and twigs, like a wild sow when about to litter.

The skin of the Black Bear is an excellent material for sleigh-robcs, hammer-cloths, caps, &c., and makes a comfortable bed for the backwoodsman or Indian; and the grease procured from this species is invaluable to the hair-dresser, being equal if not superior to

“Thine incomparable oil Macassar!”

which we (albeit unacquainted with the mode of preparing it) presume to be a compound much less expensive to the manufacturer than would be the “genuine real Bear’s grease”—not of the shops, but of the prairies and western woods.

The Black Bear is rather docile when in confinement, and a “pet” Bear is occasionally seen in various parts of the country. In our large cities, however, where civilization(?) is thought to have made the greatest advances, this animal is used to amuse the gentlemen of the fancy, by putting its strength and “pluck” to the test, in combat with bull-dogs or mastiffs. When the Bear has not been so closely imprisoned as to partially destroy his activity, these encounters generally end with the killing of one or more dogs; but occasionally the dogs overpower him, and he is rescued for the time by his friends, to “fight (again) some other day.”

We are happy to say, however, that Bear-baiting and bull-baiting have not been as yet fully naturalized amongst us, and are only popular with those who, perhaps, in addition to the natural desire for excitement, have the hope and intention of winning money, to draw them to such cruel and useless exhibitions.

Among the many Bear stories that have been published in the newspapers, and which, whether true or invented, are generally interesting, the following is one of the latest, the substance of which we will give, as nearly as we can recollect it:

A young man in the State of Maine, whilst at work in a field, accompanied only by a small boy, was attacked by a Bear which suddenly approached from the edge of the forest, and quite unexpectedly fell upon him with great fury. Almost at the first onset the brute overthrew the young farmer, who fell to the ground on his back, with the Bear clutching

him, and biting his arm severely. Nothing but the utmost presence of mind could have saved the young man, as he was unarmed with the exception of a knife, which he could not get out of his pocket owing to the position in which he had fallen. Perceiving that his chance of escape was desperate, he rammed his hand and arm so far down the throat of the Bear as to produce the effect of partial strangulation, and whilst the beast became faint from consequent loss of breath, called to the boy to come and hand him the knife. The latter bravely came to the rescue, got the knife, opened it, and gave it to him, when he succeeded in cutting the Bear's throat, and with the exception of a few severe bites, and some lacerations from the claws of the animal, was not very much injured. The Bear was carried next day in triumph to a neighbouring village, and weighed over four hundred pounds.

Such assaults are, however, exceedingly rare, and it is seldom that even a wounded Bear attacks man.

Captain J. P. McCOWN has furnished us with the following remarks: "In the mountains of Tennessee the Bear lives principally upon mast and fruits. It is also fond of a bee-tree, and is often found seeking even a wasp's or yellow-jacket's nest. In the autumn the Bear is hunted when 'lopping' for chesnuts. Lopping consists in breaking off the branches by the Bear to procure the mast before it falls. When pursued by the dogs the Bear sometimes backs up against a tree, when it exhibits decided skill as a boxer, all the time looking exceedingly good-natured; but woe to the poor dog that ventures within its reach!

"The dogs generally employed for pursuing the Bear are curs and fice, as dogs of courage are usually killed or badly injured, while the cur will attack the Bear behind, and run when he turns upon him. No number of dogs can kill a Bear unless assisted by man.

"In 1841, the soldiers of my regiment had a pet he-Bear (castrated) that was exceedingly gentle and playful with the men. It becoming necessary to sell or kill it, one of the soldiers led it down the streets of Buffalo and exposed it for sale. Of course it attracted a large crowd, and was bid for on all sides on account of its gentleness. But unfortunately Bruin was carried near a hogshead of sugar, and not disposed to lose so tempting a repast, quietly upset it, knocking out the head, and commenced helping himself in spite of the soldier's efforts to prevent the depredation. The owner of the sugar rushed out and kicked the Bear, which, not liking such treatment, gave in return for the assault made upon him, a blow that sent his assailant far into the street, to the terror of the crowd, which scattered, leaving him to satisfy his appetite for sugar unmolested."

The number of Black Bears is gradually decreasing in the more settled

parts of the "back woods," but in some portions of Carolina and Georgia, where the vast swamps prevent any attempt to settle or cultivate the land, they have within a few years been on the increase, and have become destroyers of the young stock of the Planter (which generally range through the woods) to a considerable extent.

Sir JOHN RICHARDSON says that when resident in the fur countries this Bear almost invariably hibernates, and that about one thousand skins are annually procured by the Hudson's Bay Company from those that are destroyed in their winter retreats. "It generally selects a spot for its den under a fallen tree, and having scratched away a portion of the soil, retires to it at the commencement of a snow-storm, when the snow soon furnishes it with a close, warm covering. Its breath makes a small opening in the den, and the quantity of hoar-frost which occasionally gathers round the aperture serves to betray its retreat to the hunter."

The Black Bear is somewhat migratory, and in hard winters is found to move southwardly in considerable numbers, although not in company. They couple in September or October, after which the females retire to their dens before the setting in of very cold weather.

It is said that the males do not so soon resort to winter quarters as the females, and require some time after the love season to recover their lost fat. The females bring forth about the beginning of January.

The Indian tribes have many superstitions concerning the Bear, and it is with some of them necessary to go through divers ceremonies before proceeding to hunt the animal.

GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION.

The Black Bear has been found throughout North America in every wooded district from the north through all the States to Mexico, but has not hitherto been discovered in California, where it appears to be replaced by the Grizzly Bear (*Ursus ferox*).

GENERAL REMARKS.

This species was in the early stages of natural history regarded as identical with the Black Bear of Europe. PALLAS first described it as a distinct animal, since which its specific name has remained undisturbed; its varieties have however produced much speculation, and it has frequently been supposed, and not without some reason, that the Brown Bear of our western country was a species differing from the Black Bear.

In order to arrive at a correct conclusion on this subject we must be

guided less by colour than by the form and structure of the animal and its length of heel and claws; it is evident that the size can afford us no clue whereby to designate the species, inasmuch as some individuals may be found that are nearly double the dimensions of others.

Audubon, John James and Bachman, John. 1854. "Ursus americanus, American Black Bear [Pl. CXLI, male and female]." *The quadrupeds of North America* 3, 187–197. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.322592>.

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