

VULPES FULVUS.—DESM. (VAR. ARGENTATUS.—RICH.)

AMERICAN BLACK OR SILVER FOX.

PLATE CXVI.—FEMALE.

V. magnitudine V. fulvi, argenteo niger, cauda ad apicem alba.

CHARACTERS.

Size of the red fox (vulpes fulvus); body, silvery black; tip of the tail, white.

SYNONYMES.

RENARD NOIR OU BAHYNHA. Sagard Theodat., Canada, p. 744.

EUROPEAN FOX—var. A, black. Pennant, Arct. Zool., vol. i., p. 46.

RENARD NOIR OU ARGENTÈ. Geoffroy, Collect. du Museum.

GRIZZLED FOX. Hutchins, MSS.

RENARD ARGENTÈ. F. Cuvier, Mamm. Lith., 5 livr.

CANIS GENTATUS. Desm., Mamm., p. 203.

“ “ Sabine, Franklin's Journey, p. 657.

“ “ Harlan, Fauna, p. 88.

“ “ THE BLACK OR SILVER FOX. Godman, Nat. Hist., i. 274, plate.

“ FULVUS, var. ARGENTATUS. Rich. BLACK OR SILVER FOX, F. B. A., p. 94.

BLACK FOX. DeKay, Nat. Hist. New York, p. 45.

TSCHERNOBURI. Russians.

DESCRIPTION.

Specimen from the Hon. Hudson's Bay Company.

Body, clothed with two kinds of hair; the longest, or outer hair, extends in some parts two inches beyond the under or shorter fur, especially on the neck, beneath the throat, behind the shoulders, along the flanks, and on the tail; this hair is soft, glossy, and finer than even that of the pine marten.

The under fur is unusually long and dense, measuring in some places two inches, and is exceedingly fine, feeling to the hand as soft as the finest sea-island cotton; this under fur surrounds the whole body even to the tail, on which it is a little coarser and has more the appearance of wool; it is shortest on the legs and forehead, and least dense on the belly; the hairs

composing this fur, when viewed separately, exhibit a crimped or wavy appearance; on the ears and nose scarcely any long hairs are to be seen, these parts being thickly clothed with fur.

The soles of the feet are so thickly clothed with woolly hair that no callous spots are visible.

COLOUR.

The under fur is uniformly blackish-brown or chocolate; the long hairs are brown at their roots, then silver gray, and are broadly tipped with black; the hairs on the neck, and on a dorsal line extending to the root of the tail, are black, forming a broad black line at the neck, which narrows towards the tail.

Chin, throat, and whole under surface, brownish-black; a tuft of white hairs on the neck near the chest; another white tuft near the umbilicus; upper parts glossy silvery black; sides, sprinkled with many shining silvery white hairs, which produce a somewhat hoary appearance; tail, brownish-black to near the extremity, where it is broadly tipped with white.

DIMENSIONS.

	Feet.	Inches.
Nose to root of tail, - - - - -	2	5
Length of tail, - - - - -	1	7
Height of ear, - - - - -		2 $\frac{3}{4}$
From nose to end of ear stretched back, - - -		8 $\frac{1}{2}$
“ “ eyes, - - - - -		3 $\frac{1}{8}$

HABITS.

Our account of the habits of this beautiful Fox will be perhaps less interesting to many than our description of its skin; for, as is well known, the Silver-gray Fox supplies one of the most valuable furs in the world, not only for the luxurious nobles of Russia and other parts of Europe, but for the old-fashioned, never-go-ahead Chinese, and other Eastern nations.

In the richness and beauty of its splendid fur the Silver-gray Fox surpasses the beaver or the sea-otter, and the skins are indeed so highly esteemed that the finest command extraordinary prices, and are always in demand.

The Silver-gray Fox is by no means abundant, and presents considerable variations both in colour and size. Some skins are brilliant black (with the exception of the end of the tail, which is invariably white); other

specimens are bluish-gray, and many are tinged with a cinereous colour on the sides: it perhaps is most commonly obtained with parts of its fur hoary, the shiny black coat being thickly interspersed with white or silvery-blue tipped hairs.

According to Sir JOHN RICHARDSON, a greater number than four or five of these Foxes is seldom taken in a season at any one post in the fur countries, though the hunters no sooner find out the haunts of one than they use every art to catch it. From what he observed, Sir JOHN does not think this Fox displays more cunning in avoiding a snare than the red one, but the rarity of the animal, and the eagerness of the hunters to take it, make them think it peculiarly shy.

This animal appears to be as scarce in northern Europe as in America; but we do not mean by this to be understood as considering the European Black Fox identical with ours.

The Black or Silver Fox is sometimes killed in Labrador, and on the Magdeleine Islands, and occasionally—very rarely—in the mountainous parts of Pennsylvania and the wilder portions of the northern counties of New York, where, however, PENNANT's marten is generally called the "Black Fox," by the hunters and farmers.

It gives us pleasure to render our thanks to the Hon. Hudson's Bay Company for a superb female Black or Silver-gray Fox which was procured for us, and sent to the Zoological Gardens in London alive, where J. W. AUDUBON was then making figures of some of the quadrupeds brought from the Arctic regions of our continent for this work. Having drawn this beautiful animal, which was at the time generously tendered us, but thinking it should remain in the Zoological Gardens, as we have no such establishment in America, J. W. AUDUBON declined the gift in favor of the Zoological Society, in whose interesting collection we hope it still exists. When shall we have a Zoological Garden in the United States?

This variety of the Fox does not differ in its propensities from the red Fox or the cross Fox, and its extraordinary cunning is often equalled by the tricks of these sly fellows.

The white tip at the end of the tail appears to be a characteristic of the Silver-gray Fox, and occurs in every specimen we have seen.

It is stated in MORTON's New England Canaan (p. 79), that the skin of the Black Fox was considered by the Indians, natives of that part of the colonies, as equivalent to forty beaver skins; and when offered and accepted by their kings, it was looked upon as a sacred pledge of reconciliation.

The present species has been seen "mousing" in the meadows, near Ipswich, Massachusetts, as we were informed by the late WILLIAM OAKES,



On Stone by W.E. Hitchcock

Drawn from Nature by J.W. Audubon.

American Black or Silver Fox.

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

who also wrote to us that "the common and cross Foxes were abundant about the White Mountains, and that they were most easily shot whilst scenting and following game, when their whole attention appears to be concentrated on that one object."

This Fox is occasionally seen in Nova Scotia, and a friend there informs us that some have been shot in his vicinity.

GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION.

As this variety of the Red Fox chiefly occurs in the colder regions of our continent, we cannot set it down as a regular inhabitant of even the southern parts of the State of New York, nor any part of Pennsylvania or New Jersey.

The specimens which have been obtained in the two former States were killed at long intervals, and were, moreover, not of so fine a pelage or so beautiful a colour as those from more northern latitudes.

The skins sold to the American Fur Company are from the head waters of the Mississippi river, and the territories northwest of the Missouri, and are considered equal to the best.

GENERAL REMARKS.

The production of peculiar and permanent varieties in species of animals in a wild or natural state, is a subject of remarkable interest, although it cannot be explained on any data with which we are at present acquainted.

It is singular that in several species of red Foxes, widely removed from each other in their geographical ranges, the same peculiarities occur. The red Fox of Europe (*Canis vulpes*), a species differing from ours, produces no varieties in the southern and warmer parts of that continent, but is everywhere of the same reddish colour, yet in high northern latitudes, especially in mountainous regions, it exhibits not only the black, but the cross Fox varieties.

In the western portions of our continent the large red Fox of LEWIS and CLARK, which we described from a hunter's skin in our first volume (p. 54), and to which we have elsewhere given the name of *Vulpes Utah*, runs into similar varieties.



Audubon, John James and Bachman, John. 1854. "Vulpes fulvus, American Black or Silver Fox [Pl. CXVI, female]." *The quadrupeds of North America* 3, 70–73. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.322596>.

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