



On Stone by W^m Z. Hitchcock

American Red-Fox!

Drawn from nature by J. Audubon F.R.S.E.S.

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

VULPES FULVUS.—DESM

AMERICAN RED FOX.

PLATE LXXXVII.—Male.

V. Rufo-fulvoque varius ; collo subtus ventreque imo albis ; pectore cano ; antibrachiis antice prodiisque nigris ; digitis fulvis ; caudâ apice albâ.

CHARACTERS.

Fur reddish or fulvous ; beneath the neck and belly white ; chest gray ; front part of the fore legs and feet, black ; toes fulvous ; tip of the tail white.

SYNONYMES.

CANIS FULVUS. Desm. Mamm. p. 203.

“ “ Fr. Cuvier, in Dict. des. Sc. Nat. VIII. p, 568.

RENARD DE VIRGINIE. Palesot de Beauvois Mem. Sur.

LE RENARD. Bullet, Soc. Phil.

RED FOX. Sabine, Franklin's Journ. p. 656.

CANIS FULVUS. Harlan, 89.

“ “ Godman, vol. 1, p. 280.

VULPES FULVUS. Rich. Fauna, B. A. p. 91.

“ “ De Kay, Nat. Hist. N. Y., p. 44, fig. 1, pl. 7.

DESCRIPTION.

This animal bears so strong a resemblance to the European Fox. (*v. vulgaris*), that it was regarded as the same species by early naturalists. No one, however, who will compare specimens from both countries, can have a doubt of their being very distinct. Our Red Fox is a little the largest, its legs are less robust, its nose shorter and more pointed, the eyes nearer together, its feet and toes more thickly clothed with fur, its ears shorter, it has a finer and larger brush, and its fur is much softer, finer, and of a brighter colour.

It stands higher on its legs than the Gray Fox, and its muzzle is not so long and acute, as in that species. It is formed for lightness and speed, and is more perfect in its proportions than any other species in the genus with which we are acquainted.

The hair on the whole body is soft, silky, and lustrous ; the ears are clothed with short hairs on both surfaces, and the feet and toes are so clothed

with hair, that the nails are concealed. The body of this species has a strong musky smell, far less disagreeable, however, than that of either the skunk or mink. It becomes less offensive in a state of domestication.

COLOUR.

Point of nose, outer extremity of ears, and outer surfaces of legs below the knees, black; forehead, neck, flanks, and back, bright-reddish, and a little deeper tint on the back and fore-shoulders; around the nostrils, margins of the upper jaw, and chin, pure white; throat, breast and a narrow space on the under surface, dingy-white; extreme end of brush slightly tipped with white; inner surface of ears, and base of the outer surface, yellowish. The hair on the body is of two sorts: long hairs interspersed among a dense coat of softer, brighter, and more yellowish fur; on the tail the longer interspersed hairs are more numerous, and many of them are quite black, giving the tail a more dusky appearance than rest of the body.

In addition to the distinct varieties of this species, the black and cross Fox, we have seen some shades of difference in colour in the red variety. In some the colours on the back are considerably darker than in others. We have seen several with the nose and chin nearly black, and in others the white tip at the tail is replaced with black.

DIMENSIONS.

								Feet.	Inches.
From point of nose to root of tail,	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	6
Tail (vertebræ)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1
“ to end of hair,	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	5
Height at shoulders,	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1
“ of ears posteriorly	-	-	-	-	-	-	-		2 $\frac{1}{4}$

HABITS.

This Fox, in times gone by, was comparatively rare in Virginia, and farther south was unknown. It is now seldom or never to be met with beyond Kentucky and Tennessee. Its early history is not ascertained, it was probably for a long time confounded with the Gray Fox, (which is in many parts of the country the most abundant species of the two,) and afterwards was supposed to have been imported from England, by some Fox-hunting governor of one of the “colonies.” It was first distinguished from the Gray Fox and hunted, in Virginia; but now is known to exist in all the Northern States, and we are somewhat surprised that it should so long have been overlooked by our forefathers. No doubt, however, the culti-

vation and improvement of the whole country, is the chief reason why the Red Fox has become more numerous than it was before the Revolution, and it will probably be found going farther south and west, as the woods and forests give place to farms, with hens, chickens, tame turkeys, ducks, &c., in the barn-yards.

The Red Fox is far more active and enduring than the Gray, and generally runs in a more direct line, so that it always gives both dogs and hunters a good long chase, and where the hounds are not accustomed to follow, it will frequently beat-out the whole pack, and the horses and huntsmen to boot.

In some parts of the country, however, it is chased and killed with dogs, in fine style. The following account of the mode of taking the Red Fox, at the sea side in New-Jersey, near Cape May, is from an interesting letter written to us in December, 1845, by our friend EDWARD HARRIS, Esq., of Moorestown, in the neighbourhood of Philadelphia; it is quite different from the ordinary mode of hunting the Red Fox. He begins thus:

"On Saturday, a week ago, I went to Cape May Court-house, where I spent Monday and Tuesday among the quails, (*perdix virginianus*), which I found exceedingly abundant, but the ground so bad for shooting, that in both days two of us shot but thirty-three birds. On Wednesday my friend Mr. HOLMES took me to BEASLEY'S Point at the northern extremity of the county; here I was sorry to learn that young BEASLEY, who was to have returned from Philadelphia on the Saturday previous, had not yet made his appearance; his father, however, showed a great desire to forward my views in regard to "Monsieur Reynard." The next day it rained cats and dogs, and TOM BEASLEY did not arrive in the stage. In the afternoon it cleared off sufficiently to make a "a drive" in the point, where we started a noble specimen in beautiful pelage, but alas! he would not come near the standers.

The next morning, we drove the same ground, being the only place on the main land where there was any prospect of driving a Fox to standers without dogs, (of which there are none in the vicinity). This time we saw none. After dinner I took my pointer, and bagged eight brace and a half of quails, having this time found them on good ground. The next day, Saturday, with three drivers, and three standers, we drove the beach for five and a-half miles, without seeing a fox, and so ended this unsuccessful expedition. I had great hopes of this beach, (PECK'S), as it had not been hunted since the winter before the last, although some of the gunners told me they had seen but few "signs" since that time.

The mode of driving, which requires no dogs, is for the drivers to be furnished with two boards, or shingles, which they strike together, or with

what is better, a rattle, similar to a watchman's. The standers are sent ahead to a narrow part of the beach, where the creeks of the salt-marshes approach nearest to the sand-hills : when they are supposed to have reached their stands, the drivers enter, and walk abreast among the bushes, between the sand-hills and the marshes, making all the noise they can, with their lungs, as well as their boards or rattles ; and these unusual noises are almost sure to drive the Foxes to the standers, where if they pass harmless, they have again to run the gauntlet to the end of the beach, at the inlet, where, Mr. BEASLEY assures me, he has known seven Red Foxes cornered, out of which four were killed, and three escaped from bad shooting. We made four drives in the five and a-half miles.

The facts in regard to the history of the Red Fox on the Jersey coast that I have been able to collect, are few ; such as they are I will give them to you.

Certain it is that they frequent the beaches in great numbers, and so far as I can learn, the Gray Fox is not found in the same places, nor is the raccoon, which we know to be so abundant on the sea islands and beaches of our southern coast. They pass to the beaches on the ice, in the winter season, when the "sounds" are frozen, and have frequently been seen in the day time, making their passage, though doubtless it is more frequently performed in the night. Their means of subsistence there are ample, consisting of wild fowl of various kinds, upon which they spring while they are asleep upon the ponds and creeks, but more particularly upon the wounded fowl which escape from the numerous gunners, also crabs and fish, which are thrown up dead by the surf, and rabbits and wading birds, in the summer. A marvellous story is told of their sagacity in selecting the food they like best, which is vouched for by Mr. BEASLEY, and all the gunners along shore, but which I think requires confirmation, at least so far as to have the fish in question, seen by some naturalist in the state described by the narrators, in order to ascertain its name, or describe it, if new, before its publication is ventured on. The story is, that a certain fish, called the cramp-fish, from its supposed power of paralyzing the hand which touches it while living, is thrown ashore dead, by the surf in the winter season, that every one of these fishes contains a bird, such as the coot, (either *fusca* or *perspicillata*), or a gull, which appears to have destroyed the fish, by its proving rather hard to digest, without having been plucked. Mr. Fox finds the fish that has come to this deplorable end, and either in the vain hope of restoring animation to the unfortunate defunct, or for the gratification of a less noble impulse, he makes a longitudinal incision into the peritonæum of the subject, and extracts the bird, of which he makes a meal ; but, mind

you, Mr. Fox has profited by the awful example before him—he picks the bird before he eats it. Moral—never swallow what you cannot digest. But, to be serious, I do not mean to ridicule the fact, which I cannot but believe with the testimony which accompanies it, but if it be new, which I cannot answer for, it might in its plain, unvarnished form, without being announced in pedantic Latin, afford too tempting a morceau for the snarling critic. The fish are said to reach sometimes the length of four-feet, with a mouth twenty-two inches wide, they are scaled, and are said to resemble, somewhat, the sea cat-fish, with which I am not acquainted. The Fox on the beach when hunted by hounds, resorts to his usual trick of taking the water, to throw the dogs off the scent, by following the retreating surf, so that its return may efface his trail, then lying down among the sand hills to rest, while the dogs are at fault. In the woods on the main land both Red and Gray Foxes are abundant, the latter rather predominating. The Foxes are abundant on some of the beaches, and generally may be procured. Mr. SPENCER, of Mount Holly, has been on a party when five were killed, but I do not know where, nor whether it was this season or before.”

We have not been able to procure the fish which is alluded to in the foregoing, but have no doubt of the correctness of the account. The Red Fox will eat fish as well as birds, and when hard pressed does not refuse even carrion. It is, therefore, probable that the discovery of the bird within the dead fish, may be the result of accident rather than of instinct, reason, or keenness of smell on the part of the Fox; for when he begins to devour a fish he must soon find the more savoury bird in its stomach, and being fonder of fowl than of fish, he would of course eat the bird and leave the latter. A Fox after having in this way discovered coots, gulls, or any other bird, would undoubtedly examine any dead fish that he came across, in hopes of similar good luck. Hence the foxes on the beaches have, we suppose, acquired the habit of extracting birds from the stomachs of such fish as have swallowed them, and are cast ashore dead by the storms on the coast; and they also at times get a plentiful meal from the dead birds that float ashore. We received a beautiful specimen of the Red Fox, in the flesh, from our friend Mr. HARRIS, not long after the foregoing letter, and our figure was drawn from it. We represented the animal just caught in a steel-trap.

The Red Fox brings forth from four to six young at a litter, although not unfrequently as many as seven. The young are covered, for some time after they are born, with a soft woolly fur, quite unlike the coat of the grown animal, and generally of a pale rufous colour. Frequently, however, the cubs in a litter are mixed in colour, there being some red and some

black-cross Foxes together : when this is the case it is difficult to tell which are the red and which the cross Foxes until they are somewhat grown. In these cases the parents were probably different in colour.

This animal feeds upon rats, rabbits, and other small quadrupeds, and catches birds, both by lying in wait for them, and by trailing them up in the manner of a pointer dog, until watching an opportunity he can pounce or spring upon them. In our article on the Gray Fox, (vol. 1., p. 164) we have described the manner in which this is done by that species, and the Red Fox hunts in the same way.

The Red Fox also eats eggs, and we have watched it catching crickets in an open field near an old stone wall. It is diverting to witness this—the animal leaps about and whirls round so quickly as to be able to put his foot on the insect, and then gets hold of it with his mouth ; we did not see him snap at them ; his movements reminded us of a kitten playing with a mouse.

We once knew a Red Fox that had been chased frequently, and always escaped at the same spot, by the hounds losing the track : the secret was at last found out, and proved to be a trick somewhat similar to the stratagem of the Gray Fox related in our first volume, p. 171 ; the Red Fox always took the same course, and being ahead of the dogs so far that they could not see him, leaped from a fallen log on to a very sloping tree, which he ascended until concealed by the branches, and as soon as the dogs passed he ran down and leaping on to his old track ran back in his former path. So dexterously was this "tour" performed that he was not suspected by the hunters, who once or twice actually whipped their dogs off the trail, thinking they were only following the "back track."

The Red Fox is in the habit of following the same path, which enables the fox hunters to shoot this species from "stands," even in a country where the animal has room enough to take any course he may choose to run. The "hunters" who go out from the city of New-York, are a mixed set, probably including Germans, Frenchmen, Englishmen, and Irishmen, and each one generally takes his own dog along, (on the speed and prowess of which he is ready to bet largely,) and the hunt is organized on the height beyond Weehawken in "the Jerseys," where a good many Red Foxes are to be found, as well as more Gray ones.

The men are all on foot, and station themselves along ridges, or in gaps in the rocky hilly country, now running to a point, to try and get a shot, now yelling to their dogs, and all excitement and hubbub. If the Fox doubles much, he is very apt to get shot by some one before he passes all the "standers," and the hunters then try to start another ;

but the Fox often gets away, as the underbrush is thick and a good deal of the ground swampy, and in that case he makes for a large rocky hill which stands in the Newark marshes, familiarly known as *Rattle-snake* hill. When running across the low level to this stronghold the Fox is frequently seen by the whole company of hunters, and the chase is lengthened out to a run of many miles, as Reynard will turn again toward the high ridges nearer the Hudson River.

We will give an account of one of these hunts as related by some young friends, who having two fine harriers (to contribute their share of dogs to the pack,) were gladly hailed by the other gentlemen in the field.

"After some beating about among the thickets and ravines, we found the dogs had strayed away down the side of the hills nearly to the level of the marshes, and raising our horn to call them up, observed that they were running toward a cur-dog that appeared to have come from somewhere in them; we immediately gave a loud halloo, and urged all the hounds to the chase. The cur turned tail at once, the whole pack "opened" after him in full cry, and all the hunters came running forth from the woods to the brow of the hill, whence we had a view of the whole scene. The cur looked a good deal like a Fox, at a distance, and most of the hunters thought he was one "certain," he shewed good bottom, took several leaps over the stone walls and fences, and dodged about and round patches of briars and rocks with extraordinary agility, until he got fairly off towards his home, when he positively "streaked it," until, to the utter amazement of the hunters, he jumped on to a wall enclosing a small farm yard, and disappeared within, immediately setting up a loud bark of defiance, while some of the hunters who had expressed most confidence, were loudly laughed at by their comrades, who banteringly asked what they would take for their dogs, &c., and broke out in fresh roars of merriment."

The Red Fox is taken in traps, but is so very wary that it is necessary to set them with great nicety.

DR. RICHARDSON tells us that the best fox hunters in the fur countries use *assafœtida*, *castoreum*, and other strong smelling substances, with which they rub their traps and the small twigs set up in the neighbourhood, alleging that Foxes are fond of such perfumes.

The same author informs us that their flesh is ill tasted, and is eaten only through necessity.

Red Foxes have gradually migrated from the Northern to the Southern States. This change of habitation may possibly be owing to the more extensive cultivation to which we have alluded, (at p. 265, in this article,) as a reason for this species having become more numerous than

it was before the Revolution. This idea, however, would seem to be overthrown by the continued abundance of Gray Foxes in the Eastern States. In the early history of our country the Red Fox was unknown south of Pennsylvania, that State being its Southern limit. In process of time it was found in the mountains of Virginia, where it has now become more abundant than the Gray Fox. A few years afterwards it appeared in the more elevated portions of North Carolina, then in the mountains of South Carolina, and finally in Georgia ; where we have recently observed it.

This species was first seen in Lincoln County, Georgia, in the year 1840, since then it has spread over the less elevated parts of the country, and is not rare in the neighbourhood of Augusta. We are informed by Mr. BEILE, an intelligent observer of the habits of animals, that on one occasion near Augusta, as he was using a call for wild turkeys, a little before sunrise, in the vicinity of Augusta, two Red Foxes came to the call, supposing it to be that of a wild turkey, and were both killed by one discharge of his gun.

In order to ascertain whether the speed of the Red Fox was as great in the south as in the colder regions of the north, several gentlemen near Augusta, in the winter of 1844, resolved to test the question by a regular Fox chase. They congregated to the number of thirty, with one hundred hounds, many of them imported dogs, and all in fine running order. They started a Fox at two o'clock on a moonlight morning. He took to a pretty open country on the west bank of the Savannah river. A number of gentlemen were mounted on fleet horses. Mr. BEILE rode in succession three horses during the chase, two of which were good hunters. The pursuit of the flying beast was kept up till three o'clock in the afternoon, having continued thirteen hours, when the horses and the whole pack of hounds were broken down, and the hunt was abandoned. This account does not accord with that given by RICHARDSON, who states (*Fauna Boreali. Am. p. 93.*) "The Red Fox does not possess the wind of its English congener. It runs for about a hundred yards with great swiftness, but its strength is exhausted in the first burst, and it is soon overtaken by a wolf or a mounted huntsman." It is quite evident that our estimable friend never had an opportunity of participating in the chase of the American Red Fox.

Whilst the Gray Fox seldom is known to dig a burrow, concealing its young usually beneath the ledges of rocks, under roots, or in the hollow of some fallen tree, the Red Fox on the contrary, digs an extensive burrow with two or three openings. To this retreat the Fox only flies after a hard chase and as a last resort. If, as often happens, the burrow is on level ground it is not very difficult by ascertaining the direction of the

galleries and sinking a hole at intervals of seven or eight feet, to dig out and capture the animal. When thus taken he displays but little courage—sometimes, like the Opossum, closing his eyes and feigning death.

The young, from four to six at a birth, are born in February and March, they are blind when born, and are not seen at the mouth of the den for about six weeks.

It is at this period, when the snows in the Northern States are still on the ground, that the Fox, urged by hunger and instinct, goes out in search of prey. At a later period, both the parents hunt to provide food for their young. They are particularly fond of young lambs, which they carry off for miles to their burrows. They also kill geese, turkeys, ducks, and other poultry, and have a bad reputation with the farmer. They likewise feed on grouse and partridges, as well as on hares, squirrels, and field-rats of various species, as we have previously mentioned.

GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION.

The Red Fox exists in the fur countries to the North, is found in Labrador to the East, and in the Russian settlements on the West of our continent. Its Southern limit at present is Abbeville, in South Carolina, and Augusta, in Georgia; a few individuals have been seen in those States, near the sea-board. It also appears in Tennessee, Kentucky, and Missouri. We have not heard of its existence in Florida, Louisiana, or Texas.

GENERAL REMARKS.

It is now so generally admitted that the Red Fox of America is a distinct species from the European Fox; that a comparison seems unnecessary. We have seen no specimen in this country that can be referred to *Canis vulpes*.



Audubon, John James and Bachman, John. 1851. "Vulpes fulvus, American Red Fox [Pl. LXXXVII, male]." *The quadrupeds of North America* 2, 263–271.
<https://doi.org/10.5962/p.322597>.

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.322597>

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