

REMARKS UPON THE ROUND-TAILED MUSKRAT,
NEOFIBER ALLENI, TRUE.

BY FRANK C. BAKER.

The original description of this animal appeared in *Science*, IV, No. 75, 1884, p. 34. This was followed by one of a more detailed character in the *Proceedings of the United States National Museum*, VII, 1884, p. 170. The habits and distribution of this mammal have been, until recently, matters of conjecture; but, thanks to Mr. Frank M. Chapman, we now have a number of interesting facts regarding both its habits and distribution.

The original place of capture by Dr. Whittfield, was at Georgiana, which is situated near the southern extremity of Merritts Island in Eastern Florida. Its present known locality is thirty miles south on the peninsula, opposite Micco, at "Oak Lodge," the residence of Mr. C. F. Latham. At this point the peninsula is about three-quarters of a mile wide, with a fringe of mangrove-bordered islands on the west shore. Upon the river side there are large savannas, caused by the water of the river making frequent inroads into the land, and it is upon these savannas that *Neofiber alleni* may be found in large numbers. The vegetation of the savannas consists largely of *Rhizophora mangle* and *Avicennia nitida* (red and black mangrove) and "sedge," *Borrichia frutescens*, with occasionally black or "yellow mangroves" scattered irregularly over the entire surface of the savanna. The latter are also covered with grass to a height of two or three feet. It is of this grass that *Neofiber* constructs its nest, placing it in hollow stumps, around the trunks of the "yellow mangrove," or in the open savannas. The nests when placed in a hollow are of no particular shape, seeming almost as if thrown together to fill up the depression, but when placed in the open, or about the foot of the yellow mangrove, they are then elegant pieces of animal architecture, being of a pyriform shape, from ten to twenty inches in height and nearly as large in their greatest diameter. It was not at all unusual to see from ten to fifteen nests from one point, but it is not probable that all of these were inhabited. The nests are provided with two openings, situated invariably at opposite sides leading from the single chamber within and connecting with two under-ground passageways leading in opposite directions. These runways are constructed just beneath the thick, matted grass

and they not infrequently extend for a considerable distance before emerging from the ground. The runways as a rule, have their exits upon the edge of some neighboring pond. Here the animal finds the succulent grass upon which it feeds, and which grows to a height of three or four feet in water half as deep. To procure the best portions of the grass the *Neofiber* constructs a platform of large sticks, upon which it sits and feeds at its leisure. The largest platform observed measured ten by seven inches. In all my many trips upon the water, by night, both with and without a light, I never saw *Neofiber* swimming. It is probably, therefore, not much given to nocturnal ramblings.

Mr. Chapman says of the habits of this animal:—"It is probable that *Neofiber* is much less aquatic than the last-named species (the common muskrat, *Fiber zebethicus*), a fact which would largely account for the differences observed in their habits. That *Neofiber* is quite at home in the water, however, was clearly shown by the actions of a captured individual, which, placed in a tub of water, swam and dived readily; in swimming using the tail in a peculiar gyratory manner, the tip describing circles."

After the departure of Mr. Chapman from "Oak Lodge," I spent four weeks in trapping this animal, and succeeded in catching two specimens, one of which left me nothing but his foot as a remembrance of the occasion; but the other was obtained alive and is now in my private collection. This animal when caught and placed in the bottom of my boat, made frequent attempts to escape by crawling over the side. That he is not cowardly when in captivity was shown by the ferocious manner in which he attacked my bare feet when I chanced to come in his way. Mr. Chapman's statements regarding the action of the tail in swimming were corroborated. I spent an entire morning in studying the nests and in following out numerous runways. One of these I found to extend for a distance of fifty feet and to have its exit in a pond near by. The course of this runway somewhat resembled the curves of a snake when in motion.

The description and measurements of the animal in my possession are as follows:

***Neofiber alleni* True.**

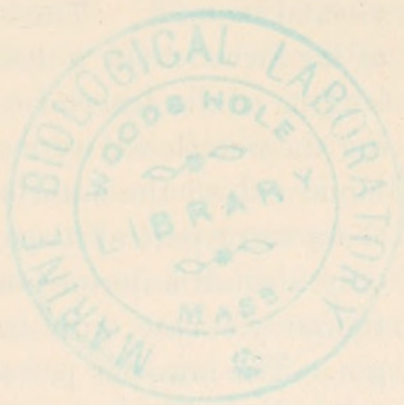
Above seal-brown; below silvery-white, with a mixture of rufous; sides seal-brown, shading to a rufescent tinge, with here and there a few silvery hairs scattered about; forehead and tip of nose black; tail of a rufescent tinge mixed with black. Adult male.

Measurement of skin (in millimeters).

Total length,	325
Tail,	126
Hind foot (without claws),	36
Middle toe of fore foot (without claw),	7
Middle toe of hind foot (without claw),	9
Longest claw of fore foot,	5
Longest claw of hind foot,	6

Measurements of skull (in millimeters).

Total length,	47
Greatest width,	28
Length of nasals,	9
Length of tooth row,	10
Front edge of first molar to posterior margin of incisor,	15
Greatest width of muzzle,	7
Width of interorbital bridge,	5
Center of occipital crest to line of hinder margin of orbits,	18





Baker, Frank Collins. 1889. "Remarks upon the Round-Tailed Muskrat, *Neofiber alleni*, True." *Proceedings of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia* 41, 271–273.

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