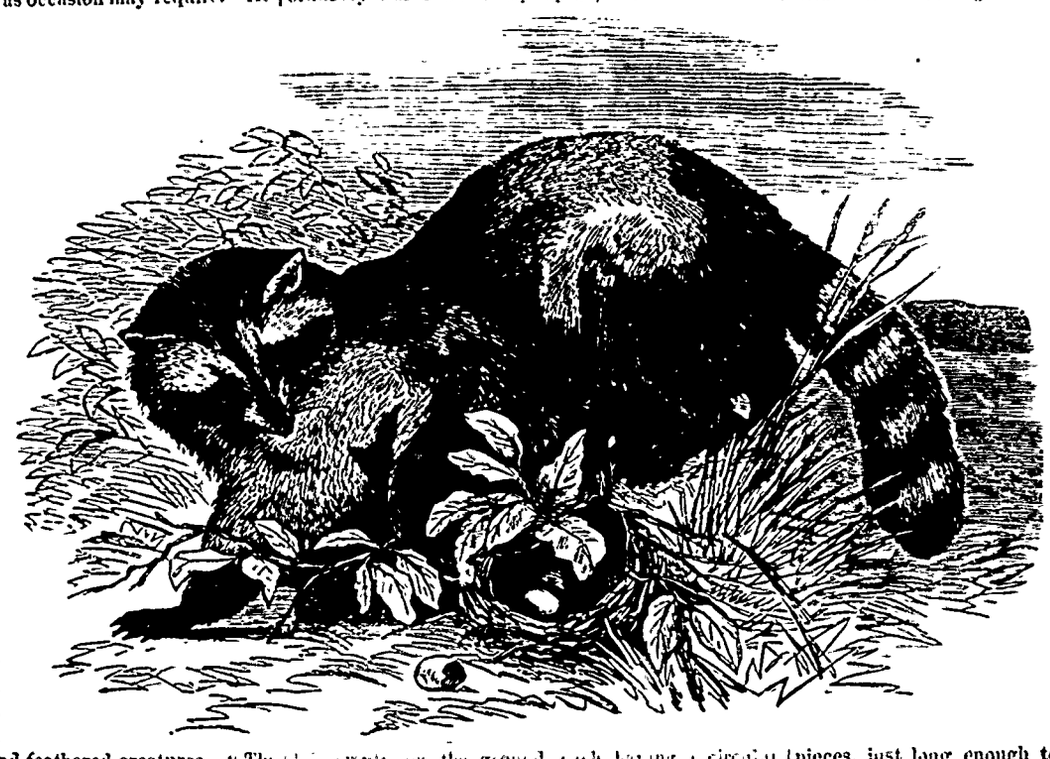
Canadian Natural History.

The Common Raccoon.

(*Procyon lotor*, Storr.)

THE Raccoon is a plantegrade mammal of the bear family, and is from twenty-two to twenty-three inches in length, with the tail about a foot additional. The general color of the animal is grayish white, the long hairs being tipped with black, and communicating this tint to the body. Upon the top of the head and accross the eyes, the fur is of an exceedingly dark brown shade and upon the knee-joint of each leg the fur is darker in color than upon any other part of the body. The head is somewhat round, the nose sharp and flexible, and the expression of the face much resembles that of the fox.

The favorite haunts of the raccoon are solitary forests, watered by streams. As regards food, the animal is nearly omnivorous. The eggs of birds, and of the soft shelled turtle, frogs, mussels, oysters, ducks, green corn, spiders &c., are some of the miscellaneous list of dainties on which the cute 'coon dines. He is hence a fisher, a hunter, a trapper, a reaper, or a fly catcher, as occasion may require. He is instinctively canning as the fox, inquisitive and meddlesome as the monkey, greedy as a bear, shy as a cat.



The raccoon has generally been supposed to dip its food in water before eating it. From this circumstance the specific name of *lotor*, or washer has by naturalists been applied to it. Some amusing particulars, which illustrate the peculiar habits and instincts of the animal, are related by an eminent naturalist respecting a raccoon that was confined in a barrack yard in this country. The menagerie, of which the 'coon formed a prominently active member, likewise comprised a bear, an owl, and various other finned and feathered creatures. "The coon was extremely tame, but could not be trusted near poultry, as it had a bad habit of pouncing suddenly upon them, grasping them in its hand-like paws, and biting off their heads in a moment. It would then devour the head and afterwards the body in a leisurely manner. There were many bats in the neighbourhood, and the soldiers were in the habit of capturing these nocturnal depredators, and throwing them on the ground within reach of the raccoon's chain. Before the bat could flap its wings, the raccoon would leap upon it, roll it rapidly in its paws for a while and then despatch it with a single bite.."

"It was rather a vengeful animal, and possessed of a tenacious memory for an insult. The great owl that was partaker of the same residence had one day been irritated with the raccoon, and had pecked it on the back. The raccoon treasured the insult in its heart, and waited a favorable time for revenge. The opportunity was not long delayed for on the first occasion that the owl ventured within reach of the raccoon's chain, the aggrieved animal crept slily towards its foe, and adroitly snatched out all the feathers of the owl's tail."

The raccoon is easily tamed, and becomes in captivity a cunning and amusing, though somewhat of a troublesome pet. He is an expert pickpocket, and keeps up an incessant inquisitive activity after sweetmeats. Unlike most animals, he has an innate propensity for fermented liquors, be they ever so strong. In reference to this singular propensity, Lawson, who was Surveyor-General of Carolina in the year 1714 says of the raccoon that "if taken young, it is easily made tame, but is the drunkenest creature living, if he can get any liquor that is sweet and strong."

Probably, however, this attributed weakness of the animal for intoxicating beverages, has been greatly over-rated.

A Singular Species of Rat.

WE take the following curious rat story from the *Sydney Morning Herald*:—"The orange trees of this colony have been subject to many adverse influences. Sometimes they have suffered from blight and drought; at others they have been roughly treated by flying foxes and peccant bipeds; but a new enemy was discovered a few days ago on the estate of Mr. Josephson, M. L. A., at Newtown. One of Mr. Josephson's gardeners observed that a tree in the middle of the orangery was robbed day by day. The rinds were left empty on the ground, each having a circular piece cut out, about the size of a florin. There were also strewn about some of the young leaves and tender branches. A close inspection was made of the trees, and among its topmost branches was discovered a clump of leaves and twigs, containing a pair of sleek rats of a glossy slate color. Much has been written in defence of rats, in view of the sanitary condition of thickly inhabited towns. These orange-eaters, however, were killed, it not being thought desirable to encourage a new variety, especially when there was a probability that it might multiply as rapidly as the brown rats, now commonly known, which within a few years of importation from the East took possession of the sewers, and exterminated their able predecessors."

MOLES.—The *Cosmos* relates an interesting experiment, which proves the service rendered to agriculturists by moles, and the impolicy of destroying these little quadrupeds. In a commune of the canton of Zurich, the municipal council were lately about to proceed to the selection of a mole-catcher, when M. Weber, a distinguished naturalist, laid befor the board the following facts. M. Weber had carefully examined the stomachs of fifteen moles caught in differerent localities, but failed to discover therein the slightest vestige of plants or of roots, whereas they were filled by the remains of ascaris, or earth-worms. M. Weber, not satisfied by this fact, shut up several moles in a box containing sods of earth, on which fresh grass was growing, and a smaller case of grubs and earth-worms. In nine days two moles devoured 311 white worms, 193 earth-worms, 25 caterpillars, and a mouse, skin and bones, which had been enclosed while alive in the box. M. Weber next gave them raw meat cut up in small pieces, mixed with vegetables; the moles ate the meat and left the plants. He next gave them nothing but vegetables; in 24 hours two moles died of starvation. Another naturalist calculated that two moles destroy 20,000 white worms in a single year.

Rural Architecture.

Balloon Houses.

AT a late meeting of the American Institute Farmer's Club, the subject of Balloon Houses was brought up by Solon Robinson, who read a letter asking information concerning the erection of balloon frames for dwelling houses.

Mr. Robinson stated that he now dwells in a house built on the balloon style of frames, the largest stick of upright timber in the building being only two by four inches square He had adopted the practice, now in vogue in many other localities, of "back lathing and plastering," which is not only a most effectual way of rendering a house warm in winter and cool in hot weather but the back lathing renders the house much stiffer than all the braces that could be put into the frame. The "back lathing" is done by nailing strips of boards on the broad sides of the studs, sawing lath into short pieces, just long enough to extend from one stud to another, and nailing them to the strips that are fastened to the studs. A heavy coat of mortar is then laid on the lath, as any wall is plastered Clay will subserve a good purpose for the "back plastering" After the mortar has become hard the inside of the studs is lathed and plastered By this means there will be two air-chambers, instead of only one, between the outside siding and the papered or whitewashed wall on the inside of the building. S. Edwards Todd said that when he lived in Central New-York he erected four houses in the balloon style of frame, and he thought the subject might be ventilated with interest and profit to builders. He said it is a mistaken idea that a *framed* building is stronger and stiffer than a balloon frame, to say nothing of the comparative expense of the two modes of building. In building a large two-story house, he had used timber for sills, only two inches by eight, which was just as good, when resting on a substantial wall, as a stick eight or ten inches square The ends of the braces in balloon frames are sawed in a mitre-box, and nailed to the timber. Balloon frames always make stiffer houses than can be made by simply framing the timbers together with mortices and tenons.