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NOTES ON CANADIAN WEASELS.

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THE LEAST WEASEL, *Mustela rixosa* (Bangs).

This diminutive carnivore is doubtless the least known of the North American weasels. About fifteen records all told, mostly from Canada, indicate both our limited knowledge and the scant possession of scientific material relative to the species. Since 1857 when Baird first described the species, data concerning its life history has accumulated slowly and even yet is of very limited extent.

The range of *rixosa*, according to Seton¹ extends in a broad band, roughly, eight or nine hundred miles in width diagonally across the continent from Montreal and the south-western extremity of Lake Superior to Alaska. As a boreal species it is restricted to the Arctic, Hudsonian, and Canadian life zones. In north-western Alaska a race of this species *P. eskimo* (Stone) is recognized, also what may prove to be a race is Rhoads'² *allegheniensis* from Pennsylvania. Thus, theoretically, southern Ontario comes within the range of the Least Weasel, but I know of no records from the region.

The Least Weasel is not only the smallest of the weasels, but is the smallest known beast of prey in the world.

In summer, the upper parts including the tail are of an even light brown color, the under parts being pure white. The winter coat is entirely white. The tail is very short and lacks at all seasons the black tip.

As a carnivorous animal its diminutive proportions may be better appreciated when compared with a mouse for instance. The Least Weasel habitually preys on mice, but exceeds them but little in size. A glance at the following measurements of *rixosa* will reveal slight difference in this respect from the genus *Microtus*, the meadow mice, etc.

Total length about 6½ inches (166 mm.); tail vertebrae, 1¼ inches (32 mm.); hind foot, 13-16 inches (21 mm.)

Measurements of a large meadow mouse (*M. pennsylvanicus*) taken Feb. 17, 1918, coll. No. 243,

male: Length, 168 mm.; tail, 50 mm.; foot 21 mm.

It will be noticed that the latter is the largest, but this one was of more than ordinary size.

The only place I ever came into contact with the Least Weasel is Edmonton, Alta., and even there where weasels are common only one was taken within a certain period of time, during which about one hundred and fifty of the other species were captured. This fact indicates its rarity in that region.

I found it about Nov. 13 in one of my traps, along the White-mud river, a few miles south-west of the city. It was pure white, proving it takes on its winter pelage as soon as the other species.

The locality in which it was collected was that ordinarily frequented by *M. cicognanii* and *M. longicauda*—meadow-like river-tracts sparsely overgrown with poplar. The first sight of its body made me think of an Albina meadow mouse. Even such small mammals sometimes spring the larger traps as all trappers know. To those who are unfamiliar with the many disappointments of the trap line, it may be said that after repeated failures at certain "sets" when bait disappears and traps are mysteriously sprung, a crushed shrew or deer-mouse in the jaws will at last dispel the mystery.

THE LONG-TAILED WEASEL, *Mustela longicauda* (Bonaparte).

This species, the largest of our Canadian weasels, should not be confused with others of the family. Great strength for its size is suggested in the muscular contour of its make-up. The legs are comparatively short and stout, the body compact and very muscular, and the head massively formed in alliance with its other physical proportions.

In size it approaches that of a small mink and in summer coat with hasty glance might be mistaken for one. In winter, as Seton remarks, it could easily be mistaken for a big white squirrel, that is, upon the ground. It has a closest resemblance to *M. noveboracensis* but as the range of the two species do not coincide and as extra limital occurrences are rare, little or no confusion should be experienced in the field.

¹Seton, E. T., Life Hist. of Northern Animals, Vol. II, p. 861, 1909.

²Rhoads, S. N., Mamm. of Penn. and N.J., pp. 173-176, 1903.