

ARVICOLA ORYZIVORA.—BACH.

RICE MEADOW-MOUSE.

PLATE CXLIV. FIG. 3

A. Pennsylvanicam equans, capite longo, rostro acuto, corpore gracili, auriculis prominulis, cauda longitudine trunci; supra ferruginea rufus, subtus subalbida.

CHARACTERS.

Size of Arvicola Pennsylvanica; head, long; nose, sharp; body, slender; ears, prominent; tail, the length of the body, without including the head; colour, rusty brown above, beneath whitish.

DESCRIPTION.

In form this species bears a distant resemblance to the cotton rat (*Sigmodon hispidum*); it is, however, a much smaller species. The ears, which are half the length of the head, are rounded, and are thickly clothed with hair on both surfaces; the feet are rather small; there is a short blunt nail in place of a thumb; under surface of palms, and tarsus, naked; toes on the hind-feet, long, the three middle ones of nearly an equal length; tail, rather long, thickly clothed on both surfaces with short hairs; whiskers, short, scarcely reaching the ears.

COLOUR.

The fur on the upper surface is slate colour, tipped with light brown and black, giving it on the dorsal aspect a dark grayish-brown tint, fading into lighter on the sides, and into whitish-gray on the belly and under surface; the ears are of the colour of the sides; feet, whitish; tail, brown on the upper surface, lighter beneath; whiskers, black and white.

DIMENSIONS.

	Inches.	Lines.
Length of head and body, - - - - -	5	2
“ of tail, - - - - -	4	

	Inches.	Lines.
From end of heel to point of longest nail, - - -	1	2
" point of nose to ear, - - - - -	1	
Height of ear, - - - - -		5½

HABITS.

The Rice Meadow-Mouse, as its name implies, is found in particular localities in the banks of the rice-fields of Carolina and Georgia. It burrows in the dykes or dams a few inches above the line of the usual rise of the water. Its burrow is seldom much beyond a foot in depth. It has a compact nest at the extremity, where it produces its young in April. They are usually four or five. In spring this Mouse is in the habit of sitting on the dams near the water, and is so immoveable, and so much resembles the colour of the surrounding earth, that it is seldom noticed until it moves off to its retreat in the banks. We have observed it scratching up the rice when newly planted and before it had been overflowed by the water. When the rice is in its milky state this animal commences feeding on it, and continues during the autumn and winter, gleaning the fields of the scattered grains. We have also seen its burrows in old banks on deserted rice-fields, and observed that it had been feeding on the large seeds of the Gama grass (*Tripsicum dactyloides*), and on those of the wild rye (*Elymus Virginicus*). A singular part of the history of the Rice Mouse is the fact that in the extensive salt-marshes along the borders of Ashley and Cooper rivers, this species is frequently found a quarter of a mile from the dry ground. Its nest is suspended on a bunch of interlaced marsh grass. In this situation we observed one with five young. At certain seasons this little animal feeds on the seeds of the marsh grass (*Spartina glabra*). When these fail it sometimes retires to the shore for food, but has no disrelish to the small crustacea and mollusks that remain on the mud at the subsiding of the tide.

This species swims rapidly, and dives in the manner of the European water-rat (*Arvicola amphibia*), or of our *Arvicola Pennsylvanica*. In an attempt at capturing some alive, they swam so actively, and dived so far from us, that the majority escaped. Those we kept in captivity produced young in May and September; they were fed on grains of various kinds, but always gave the preference to small pieces of meat.

GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION.

We obtained several specimens of this Mouse through the aid of our friend Dr. ALEXANDER MOULTRIE, who assisted us in capturing them on his

rice plantation in St. John's parish, South Carolina. We procured a considerable number on the salt marshes near Charleston, saw several on the eastern banks of the Savannah river, and near Savannah; and the late Dr. LEITNER brought us a specimen obtained in the Everglades of Florida. This *Arvicola* is said to exist as far to the north as New Jersey.

GENERAL REMARKS.

We obtained specimens of *Arvicola Oryzivora* in the winter of 1816, but did not describe it until May 1836, when we designated it by the above name. Having occasion to send descriptions of several, then undescribed, species to the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia, we sent a specimen of this animal to Dr. PICKERING, requesting him and Dr. HARLAN to compare it with the *Arvicola riparia* of ORD, a species which we had not seen, stating our reasons why we regarded it as distinct. In searching in the Academy, a specimen of this species was found, and Dr. HARLAN, in opposition to the views of PICKERING, felt himself authorized to publish it in SILLIMAN'S American Journal (vol. xxxi.), bestowing on it the name of *Mus palustris*, making use of the head of our specimen for an examination of the teeth.

The teeth and general appearance of this species, the form of its body, and especially its ears and tail being thickly clothed with hair, render it apparent that it does not belong to the genus *Mus*, but is more nearly allied to *Arvicola*. As the name "*Arvicola palustris*" is pre-occupied (HARLAN'S Fauna, p. 136), we are favoured with an opportunity of extricating it from the confusion of synonymes in which it would otherwise be involved, and of restoring it to its true genus under the name given by its legitimate describer.



Fig. 1.

Fig. 2.
On Stone by W^m E Hitchcock

Fig. 3.

Fig. 1. *Townsend's Arvicola.* Fig. 2. *Sharp-nosed Arvicola.* Fig. 3. *Bank Rat*

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