

PHASCOLOMYS LATIFRONS, Owen.

Broad-fronted Wombat.

Phascolomys latifrons, Owen in Proc. of Zool. Soc., part xiii. p. 82.—Waterh. Nat. Hist. of Mamm., vol. i. p. 252.

WHEN I attempted to write the history of the *Phascolomys Wombat* in the preceding page of this work, no authenticated specimen from the continent of Australia existed in our museums, and I then stated that the question of there being more than one species of this form must remain in doubt for the present, this remark having special reference to the species characterized from a skull by Professor Owen, under the name of *latifrons*; but during the present year, the skin of a large Wombat from the southern parts of the continent of Australia has arrived in this country, unfortunately "sans teeth, sans skull, sans everything" that could have settled the question as to there being one or two species; if, however, we may judge from the skin, much difference exists between the island and continental animals. In size, this skin, which is now in the British Museum, far exceeds all others I have seen; in colour too it is equally distinct; for while most of the specimens from Tasmania are either black, brown, or greyish brown, that from Victoria is of a light sandy buff or isabelline colour. I cannot then do otherwise than give a figure of this skin, which I presume to be an example of Professor Owen's *Phascolomys latifrons*. Surely some of the collectors in South Australia or Victoria will forward specimens to Europe, and not leave zoologists still in doubt respecting the existence or non-existence of a second species.

"Of the Broad-fronted Wombat," says Mr. Waterhouse, "all that is known is a skull sent from South Australia to Professor Owen. This skull presents so many marked differences when compared with that of the *Phasc. Wombat*, that no doubt can be entertained of the existence of two distinct species of Wombats. I have sought in vain, however, amongst the specimens of Wombats contained in our museums, for an animal which might be identified with Professor Owen's new species. In none have I found the incisor teeth presenting the broadest surface in front, a peculiarity in which the *P. latifrons* differs from *P. Wombat*, where the broadest part of the incisor is at the side. The new species differs moreover in having the upper incisors distinctly broader than the lower, whilst in the Common Wombat the upper and lower incisors are very nearly equal in width, when viewed in front. The following points of distinction presented by the skull of *P. latifrons*, when compared with that of *P. Wombat*, are for the most part pointed out in some notes from the pen of Professor Owen, who has kindly placed them at my disposal:—

"The skull of *Phasc. latifrons* is rather smaller and broader in proportion to its length; the upper incisors have a semi-oval, transverse section; the convex enamelled surface directed more forward, and longitudinally substriated. The lower incisors narrower, trihedral, with the enamelled outer surface flat. The first lower molar tooth relatively larger, the last relatively smaller. The lower jaw is shorter, more suddenly curved behind, and has the symphysis deeper; the intermaxillary part of the skull is higher in proportion to the width, and less convex externally; the palate is less contracted between the foremost molars, and the palatine portion of the intermaxillaries is wider and very concave. The nasal bones are broader, forming the whole upper surface of the anterior third of the skull. The interorbital part of the cranium is much broader, and presents a well-marked supraorbital ridge and postorbital processes, both of which are almost obsolete in *Phasc. Wombat*. The temporal fossæ are not bounded, as in the last-mentioned animal, by two nearly parallel ridges, but are continued by a convex tract to the upper surface of the cranium; and the supratympanic depression is much larger."

This, like most other Australian quadrupeds, forms an article of food, its flesh being brought to market for the supply at least of the Celestial part of the mixed population of that country, as will be seen by the following extract from the "Ovens and Murray Advertiser":—

"A NOVELTY.—We happened a few days ago to walk through one of the Chinese camps, and were attracted by a crowd of mixed people standing outside the shop of a Celestial butcher who lives in Joss-house-street, by a full-main encampment. Taking a place among the assemblage, we beheld, tethered to the door-frame, a full-grown Wombat, which was ever and anon turned and hauled about by some one of the bystanders. One Chinaman, more curious than the rest of his fellows, put the animal through its 'facings'; and after spending some time in stroking down its back, examining its hair and pinching its sides, he lifted the round plump body of the Wombat on its fore legs, and viewed it all over. The act was received by his countrymen as a capital joke, setting them all laughing, accompanied by a sing-song sonorous 'yabber' that we did not understand. When it had subsided, we moved out of the heterogeneous group, and observed on an adjoining table pieces of strange-looking meat. We made inquiry, and learned that the flesh was pieces of Wombat offered for sale by the Chinese victualler."

The accompanying Plates represent the head of the natural size, and the entire animal much reduced.