

# PHASCOLOMYS WOMBAT, *Per. et Les.*

## Wombat.

- Phascolomys Wombat*, Peron et Lesueur, Voy. aux Terres Australes, Atlas, tab. 28.—Desm. Mamm., part i. p. 276.—  
Waterh. in Jard. Nat. Lib. Mamm., vol. x. p. 300.—Ib. Nat. Hist. of Mamm., vol. i. p. 246.—Gunn  
in Proc. of Roy. Soc. of Van Diem. Land, vol. ii. p. 85.  
——— *fossor*, Sevastianoff in Mém. de l'Acad. Imp. de St. Pétersb., tom. i. p. 444.  
——— *wombatus*, Leach, Zool. Misc., vol. ii. p. 101. pl. 96.  
——— *fusca*, Desm. Dict. des Sci. Nat., tom. xxv. p. 500. tab. G 44. fig. 1.  
——— *Bassii*, Less. Man. du Mamm., p. 229.  
——— *ursinus*, Gray, List of Mamm. in Coll. Brit. Mus., p. 95.  
*Didelphis ursina*, Shaw, Gen. Zool., vol. i. part ii. p. 504.  
*Wombatus fossor*, Geoff.  
*Opossum hirsutum*, Perry, Arcana.  
*Amblotis fossor*, Ill. Prod., p. 77.  
*Perameles fossor*, Peron.  
*Womback*, Bewick's Quadr., 6th Edit. p. 522.  
*Wombat*, Collins's Account of New South Wales, vol. ii. p. 153, and plate at p. 157.  
*Badger*, of the Colonists.

THE Wombat may be regarded as one of the most curious of the Australian Mammals, ranking as it does, in respect to its anomalous structure and appearance, with the Koala and Ornithorhynchus. In no other part of the world is the form to be found, and it is difficult to say of which of the great groups of placental animals it is the representative in its own class—the *Marsupiate*. I obtained several examples in Van Diemen's Land, but failed in procuring continental specimens, which I regret, because it leaves the question as to there being more than one species of this form still undecided; nor can this point be determined until specimens from South Australia have been sent to Europe, or until comparisons have been made in that country by a naturalist competent to set the question at rest. Professor Owen informs us that a skull in the Collection of the Royal College of Surgeons, sent from South Australia, offers sufficient differences from skulls from Van Diemen's Land to convince him that there are at least two species; and when such a statement is made by so high an authority, the doubt that exists on the subject is much diminished. Mr. Waterhouse also states, that in his opinion the continental species will prove to be distinct from the animal found in Van Diemen's Land and the islands in Bass's Straits. I may mention also that His Excellency Sir George Grey has placed in my hands a pencil drawing of the head of a specimen killed in South Australia, to which, from the great breadth of the head, the name of *latifrons*, proposed by Professor Owen for the continental animal, might apply. There appears, therefore, good reasons for concluding that the continental animal is really distinct; but the question still remains an open one, and it is much to be regretted that both skins and skeletons have not been sent home, for its proper elucidation. After what has been stated, it is almost superfluous to say, that my figure was taken from a specimen procured in Van Diemen's Land, where the animal, particularly in certain districts, is extremely common. I met with it myself in the neighbourhood of Port Arthur, in the sterile districts behind Mount Wellington, and in many other situations where a similar character of country prevails. It is also found in the islands in Bass's Straits, where the specimen first described, in "Collins's Voyage," vol. ii. p. 153, was procured. In its habits it is nocturnal, living in the deep stony burrows, excavated by itself, during the day, and emerging on the approach of evening, but seldom trusting itself far from its stronghold, to which it immediately runs for safety on the appearance of an intruder. The natives state, however, that it sometimes indulges in a long ramble, and, if a river should cross its course, quietly walks into the water and traverses the bottom of the stream until it reaches the other side; but I am unable to confirm this statement from personal observation. In its disposition it is quiet and docile in the extreme, soon becoming familiar with and apparently attached to those who feed it; as an evidence of which, I may mention that the two specimens which are now (1855), and have been for a long period, living in the Gardens of the Zoological Society in the Regent's Park, not only admit the closest inspection, but may be handled and scratched by all who choose to make so intimate an acquaintance with them. The following notes are from the pens of various authors who have written on the Wombat; the earliest of whom was Mr. Bass, in "Collins's Voyage" above referred to.

"The *Wombat*," says Mr. Bass, "is a squat, thick, short-legged, and rather inactive quadruped. Its figure and movements strongly remind one of those of a Bear; its pace, too, is hobbling or shuffling, and not unlike the awkward gait of that animal. In disposition it is mild and gentle, but it bites hard and becomes furious when provoked, and then utters a low cry between a hissing and a whizzing sound, which