

PHALANGISTA COOKI, *Desm.*

Cook's Phalangista.

- Phalangista Cookii*, Desm. Nouv. Dict. d'Hist. Nat., tom. xxv. p. 478.—Temm. Mon. de Mamm., tom. i. p. —
Gray, Ann. Nat. Hist. new ser. 1838, vol. i. p. 107.
——— *Banksii*, Gray, Ann. Nat. Hist. new ser. 1838, vol. i. p. 107.
Phalanger de Cook, Cuv. Règn. Anim. ed. 1817, tom. i. p. 179 ; ed. 1829, tom. i. p. 183.
——— *Bougainville*, Cuv. Règn. Anim. ed. 1829, tom. i. p. 183.
Phalangista Bougainvillii, Wagn. in Schreb. Saug. 111, 112. Heft, p. 82.
New Holland Opossum, Penn. Hist. of Quad., vol. ii. p. 301.
White-tailed Opossum, Shaw, Gen. Zool., vol. i. p. 504.
Phalangista (Pseudochirus) Cookii, Waterh. Nat. Hist. of Mamm., vol. i. p. 299.—Gunn in Proc. of Roy. Soc. Van Diem. Land, vol. ii. p. 84.
Balantia Cookii, Kuhl, Beitr. 63.
Hepoona Cookii, Gray, List of Mamm. in Coll. Brit. Mus., p. 84.
Ring-tailed Opossum of the Colonists.
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A QUESTION has been raised by some modern mammalogists, whether the Ring-tailed Opossum of New South Wales, characterized by the rusty-red hue of its colouring, and the animal of the same form inhabiting Van Diemen's Land, which is principally of a sooty blackness, are distinct species, or merely varieties of one and the same animal. Mr. Waterhouse considers them to be identical: Mr. Ogilby, on the other hand, is of opinion that they are not, and has given the name of *viverrina* to the island or darker-coloured specimens, retaining that of *Cooki* for the animal from New South Wales: now, it may be asked, what is the opinion of one who has seen these animals in a state of nature? In reply, I may say, that I have hunted them upon very many occasions in both countries, and that I invariably found the black specimens to be confined to Van Diemen's Land, and the red ones to New South Wales; besides which, I observed that the island examples were of a larger size and were always dressed in a softer and longer fur.

My figure of *Phalangista Cooki* represents the animal as it generally appears in the brushes of New South Wales, while that of *P. viverrina* as correctly portrays the one killed in Van Diemen's Land. It will be seen that, at least for the present, I have regarded them as distinct.

The *Phalangista Cooki* is strictly nocturnal in its habits, sleeping in the hollow spouts and holes of the larger trees during the day and leaving its retreat on the approach of darkness, sometimes descending to the ground, but more frequently ascending to the smaller branches to feed upon the flowers and tender shoots of the *Eucalypti*.

Its flesh is delicate, juicy, and well-tasted, and is much prized by the aborigines.

I have spoken of the brushes of New South Wales as being the part of the country inhabited by this animal; it is just possible that it may also be found on the plains and *Angophora* flats between the lower mountain ranges; but it must not be confounded with a smaller and more woolly species which is there found, the *Phalangista laniginosa*, a figure and description of which will be found in its proper place in this work.

The fur is dense and somewhat harsh to the touch; its colour on the upper surface of the body and tail in some specimens is dark brown, grizzled with grey; in others a greyer hue prevails; face, cheeks, sides of the neck and body, the outer surface of the limbs and the under surface of the basal portion of the tail, rich deep rust-red; sides of the muzzle blackish; eyes surrounded by a series of black hairs; chin, under surface of the body and inner sides of the limbs tawny, increasing to rufous in some specimens; in some examples the apical half of the tail is white, in others the apical third, and in others it is of nearly the same hue as the basal portion, but this latter state rarely occurs.

The Plate represents the sexes somewhat under the size of life.