PHALANGISTA VULPINA, *Desm.*

Vulpine Phalangista.

Didelphys vulpina, Shaw, Gen. Zool., vol. i. p. 503.
——— *lemurina*, Shaw, Gen. Zool., vol. i. p. 487. pl. 110.
Phalangista vulpina, Desm. in Nouv. Dict. d'Hist. Nat., tom. xxv. p. 475.—Ib. Ency. Méth. Mammalogie, part i. p. 267.—Temm. Monog. de Mamm., tom. i. p. 5.—Gray, List of Mamm. in Coll. Brit. Mus., p. 86.—Martin in Proc. of Zool. Soc., part 4. p. 2.
——— *melanura*, Wagn. in Schreb. Saug. Suppl. 111, 112. Heft, p. 81.
——— *xanthopus*, Ogilby, Proc. of Comm. of Sci. and Corr. of Zool. Soc., part i. p. 135.—Waterh. Nat. Hist. of Mamm., vol. i. p. 294.
Phalanger de Cook, F. Cuv. et Geoff. Mammifères, pl. 45.
Vulpine Opossum, Phillips's Voy. to Botany Bay, p. 150, and pl.
Wha Tapoa Roo, White's Journ. of a Voy. to New S. Wales, p. 278, and pl.
Phalangista (Trichosurus) vulpina, Waterh. Nat. Hist. of Mamm., vol. i. p. 284. pl. 9. fig. 1.

Of all the Opossums inhabiting Australia, the *Phalangista vulpina* is by far the commonest, and the one most widely distributed over the country, being found in all parts of New South Wales, Port Philip, and Southern and Western Australia. According to Mr. Waterhouse, it is also found in Northern Australia; but I observe that specimens from that country are larger than those obtained in the countries above mentioned, and a doubt exists in my mind as to their identity.

During my travels in Australia no living mammal was more frequently presented to my notice, and no one was more often brought by the natives to the camp-fire for the purpose of eating. All these examples were of a uniform grizzly-grey, and in no instance did I meet with the dark colouring of *Phalangista fuliginosa*, in my account of which species I stated, that I believed its true and exclusive habitat o be Van Diemen's Land; that opinion I now find to be incorrect, as I have recently received examples from the dense brushes near the coast of the continent; its range therefore, independently of Van Diemen's Land, evidently extends over the brushes of New South Wales, and perhaps future research may prove that it enjoys a still wider range of habitat.

The *Phalangista vulpina*, like its congener, is strictly nocturnal in its habits, living in the hollow spouts and holes of the large gum-trees during the day, and ascending the branches during the night to feed upon the buds, leaves and fruit; sometimes descending to the ground, where it probably finds herbs to its taste. "While climbing," says Mr. Waterhouse, "its prehensile tail assists it to maintain a firm hold of the branches: in captivity I have noticed, that in descending from one perch of its cage to another, or to the floor, the tail invariably encircled the perch it was quitting until the animal was again securely lodged. Numerous specimens have from time to time formed part of the Zoological Society's living collection, and, from my own observations, they appeared to be by no means intelligent animals. During the day-time they were usually asleep, but towards evening they became active, and on the alert for their food, consisting of bread and milk, and various vegetable substances, including fruits. Whatever eatable was given to them, was taken by and held between the hands, in the manner a squirrel holds a nut. Occasionally a dead bird was given to them, when they evinced an evident fondness for such food, and more particularly for the brain, which was the part first consumed."

This animal constitutes a considerable part of the food of the natives, who diligently search for it, and having discovered a tree in which it is secreted, ascend it with surprising agility; the position of the animal being ascertained, a hole is cut with their little axes sufficiently large to admit the naked arm; it is then seized by the tail, the chopping and jarring of the tree not inducing it to leave its retreat, and before it has time to bite, or use its powerful claws, it is deprived of life by a blow against the side of the tree, and thrown to the ground; its captor proceeding to his encampment with a dinner in perspective. I have