PHALANGISTA FULIGINOSA, *Ogilby.*

Sooty Phalangista.

Phalangista fuliginosa, Ogilby in Proc. of Comm. of Sci. and Corr. of Zool. Soc., Part I. p. 135.—Gray, List of Mamm. in Brit. Mus., p. 85.—Waterh. Nat. Hist. of Mamm., vol. i. p. 288.
Phalangista Cuvieri, Gray.
———— *felina*, Wagn. ?

A QUESTION has been raised by Mr. Waterhouse, no mean authority as regards mammalia, whether the *Phalangista fuliginosa* of Mr. Ogilby is really a distinct species from *Phalangista vulpina* : admitting that he has some slight grounds for the suspicion alluded to, I am myself induced to consider them to be distinct ; and I have come to this conclusion from having seen much of the two animals in a state of nature ; I have taken them alive, fed upon their flesh, and their skins have served me for a covering in the country they both inhabit. The true and, I believe, exclusive habitat of the animal to which Mr. Ogilby gave the name of *fuliginosa* is Van Diemen's Land, while the continent of Australia is as exclusively the native country of the *P. vulpina*. Two important points of difference between the two animals are found to exist : the island species or *P. fuliginosa* far exceeds the other in size, and is subject to great variety in its colouring, varying as it does from an almost jet-black to light grey, while many are characterized by a large admixture of red of a greater or lesser degree of intensity : on the other hand, the continental species or *P. vulpina* are of a uniform light grey,—at least that was the colouring of all those I saw while resident in the country ; the fur of the Van Diemen's Land animal is also of a more dense and frizzly character. The skins of the island and continental animals are both made into sleeping rugs, but the former are esteemed so much more highly, that a rug formed of them is considered worth three times the price of one of the latter. I am aware that climate has considerable influence over many animals, but it is not usual to find increase of size and depth of colouring in the colder latitudes. The habits of both animals are as nearly alike as may be : strictly nocturnal, they spend the entire day in sleep in the hollows of the boles and large limbs of the *Eucalypti* and other trees of the forest ; on the approach of night they sally forth, and sometimes seek their food on the ground, but more frequently among the branches ; the food consisting of the leaves and tender shoots, and the flowers and honey-cups of the *Eucalypti*. They both form a considerable article of food for the natives, who having discovered their retreat cut a hole in the branch, fearlessly insert their hand in the hole, seize the animals by the tail, drag them forth, and despatch them by beating the head against the tree ; when roasted the flesh is white and delicate, and not unlike that of a rabbit.

The animal in the British Museum which has been named *P. Cuvieri* by Mr. Gray, is considered by Mr. Waterhouse to be identical with the present species, as the feet and incisor teeth, which are larger than those of *P. vulpina*, precisely agree with those of *P. fuliginosa*, from which it only differs in being paler and in having the tail less bushy ; and with respect to these differences, he remarks, that the animal had lived in confinement for some time prior to its death, and when it died had shed the greater portion of the longer and coarser hairs of the fur ; I may add that I have myself examined the animal, and believe that it is referable to one or other of the above species, and I conclude from its greater size that it must be regarded as synonymous with *P. fuliginosa*. I have had no opportunity of examining the *P. felina* of M. Wagner ; Mr. Waterhouse remarks that it agrees in size with *P. fuliginosa*, with some of the varieties of which it also agrees in colouring ; he does not believe it to be a distinct species, and as I know of no other it resembles, I regard it, at least for the present, as synonymous with the animal here represented.

Much variation in colour is found to exist in this animal, some having the general colour almost black, especially on the back, with a rich brown hue on the sides and the throat ; chest and under parts of a rich brownish fulvous hue, rather deeper on the abdomen than elsewhere ; the chin and muzzle, back of the ears, feet and tail almost entirely black ; others are of a very deep rufous brown tint, much suffused with black on the back ; others are of a rich rufous grey, and others again are entirely grey.

The figure in the accompanying Plate, which was drawn from life, represents a dark variety, somewhat less than the natural size.