MYRMECOBIUS FASCIATUS, Waterh.

Banded Myrmecobius.

Myrmecobius fasciatus, Waterh. in Proc. of Zool. Soc., Part IV. pp. 69 and 131.—Ib. Trans. of Zool. Soc., vol. ii. p. 149. pl. 27.—Ib. Nat. Lib. Mamm., vol. ix. (Marsupialia), p. 145. pl. xi.—List of Mamm. in Brit. Mus. Coll., p. 100.

Noom-bat, Aborigines of the York and Toodyay districts of Western Australia. Wai-haw, Aborigines of King George's Sound.

The beautiful animal forming the subject of the present Plate is a native of Western Australia, where it is very generally dispersed over the interior of the Swan River Settlement, from King George's Sound on the south to the neighbourhood of Moore's River on the north, and as far westward as civilized man has yet been able to penetrate. Although it must have been known to the settlers from the foundation of the colony, yet it is only within the last ten years that specimens have been sent to Europe, and brought under the notice of the scientific world. For the first description of this elegant marsupial we are indebted to Mr. Waterhouse, who, from the scanty materials of a single skin, formed a just view of its affinities and assigned it to the order—the Marsupialia—to which it naturally belongs. Sterile sandy districts thinly studded with moderately sized trees appear to be congenial to its habits and mode of life. As the form of its teeth would indicate, insects constitute a great part of its food; but I believe that it also feeds upon honey and a species of manna which exudes from the leaves of the *Eucalypti*. Wherever the Myrmecobius takes up its abode, there ants are found to be very abundant, and in all probability, for I have no direct evidence that such is the case, it is upon this insect or its larvæ that it mainly subsists.

As regards the ornamental appearance of this animal, I need only call the attention of my readers to the accompanying figures, where it is represented of the natural size. When running on the ground with its beautiful tail spread out to the full extent, it offers a great resemblance to the Squirrels. On the slightest appearance of danger it secretes itself in a hollow tree, from which it is not easily driven. Much diversity exists in the markings of different individuals, and these variations are common to both sexes. In animals of the same age the male considerably exceeds the female in size. The young from their earliest youth are marked with fasciæ like the adult, so that the latter are to be distinguished only by size, or ascertained by dissection.

The following remarks, which I give in the words of the respective writers, and in the order they have reached me, may not prove uninteresting:—

"Two of these animals," says Mr. Dale (from one of which Mr. Waterhouse took his description), "were discovered about ninety miles south-east of Swan River, and within a few miles of each other. They were first observed on the ground, and on being pursued, both directed their flight to some hollow trees which were near. The country in which they were found abounded in decayed trees and ant-hills." (Waterhouse's Marsupialia, p. 147.)

"You may place great reliance," writes His Excellency G. Grey, Esq., Governor of South Australia, "on the following description of the habits of Myrmecobius; it is partly derived from the natives, and partly from the observations of Mrs. Grey, who has seen several in a state of captivity. It cannot run very fast. Its tongue is about as thick as a common tobacco-pipe and gradually tapers; it is extensile and can be protruded from the mouth for several inches, and when in this state the animal moves it about with great rapidity. In the daytime it lives in decayed trees; at night it runs about and climbs the trees like an opossum. One that was kept in confinement was fed on sugar and milk, in which it dipped its tongue."

In a letter lately received from Mr. Gilbert he states, "I have seen a good deal of this beautiful little animal. It appears very much like a squirrel when running on the ground, which it does in successive leaps, with its tail a little elevated; every now and then raising its body and resting on its hind-feet. When alarmed it generally takes to a dead tree lying on the ground, and before entering the hollow invariably raises itself on its hind-feet to ascertain the reality of approaching danger. In this kind of retreat it is easily captured, and when caught is so harmless and tame as scarcely to make any resistance, and never to attempt to bite. When it has no chance of escaping from its place of refuge it utters a sort of half-smothered grunt, apparently produced by a succession of hard breathings. I have heard of this animal being frequently kept in confinement and fed for several weeks together upon no other food than bran.

"The female is said to bring forth her young in a hole in the ground or in a fallen tree, and to produce from five to nine in a litter. I have not myself observed more than seven young attached to the nipples. Like the members of the genus Antechinus, this animal has no pouch for protection or envelopment of the young." The only protection afforded their delicate offspring is the long hairs which clothe the under sur-

The hair of the Myrmecobius is harsh and bristly to the touch. A black stripe passes from the nose through the eye to the neck; shoulders and upper part of the back bright rusty red, which gradually fades into rusty brown on the crown of the head, face and ears; back distinctly banded with lines of buffy white and blackish brown, the number of bands varying in different individuals; chin, throat and all the under surface yellowish white; upper part of both fore- and hind-feet rusty yellow; tail bushy for its whole length and parti-coloured, some of the hairs being black, while others are rusty red or yellowish white; in some instances the hairs of the tail are black at the base, then yellowish white, and terminate in rusty red.

The Plate represents an adult male and female of the size of life.