## ORNITHORHYNCHUS ANATINUS.

## Ornithorhynchus.

Platypus Anatinus, Shaw, Nat. Misc., vol. x. pl. 385.—Ib. Gen. Zool., vol. i. part i. p. 229. pls. 66 & 67.—Gray. List of Mamm. in Coll. Brit. Mus., p. 191.

Ornithorhynchus paradoxus, Blumenbach in Voigt's Magaz., tom. ii. p. 305. pl. 41.—Home in Phil. Trans. 1800, p. 432, and 1802, p. 67.—Cuv. Règn. Anim. Edit. 1829, tom. i. p. 235.—Meckel, Ornith. paradoxi desc. anatom., Lips. 1826, fol.—Owen in Trans. Zool. Soc., vol. i. p. 221.—Bennett in Trans. Zool. Soc., vol. i. p. 229.

brevirostris, Ogilby in Proc. of Comm. of Sci. and Corr. of Zool. Soc., part i. p. 150.

— crispus et lævis, MacGill. in Mem. of the Wernerian Soc. 1832, p. 127.

— Anatinus, Waterh. Nat. Hist. of Mamm., vol. i. p. 25.

On commencing a history of the Ornithorhynchus, the mind naturally reverts to the period of its first discovery; a period so recent, that the animal was unknown to Linnæus and the older authors. It was in 1799 that a description of this singular quadruped first appeared in the "Naturalists' Miscellany" of Dr. Shaw; about this time also, the Koala, Wombat, Kangaroo, Emu, Menura, Cereopsis, and Black Swan were made known. These important discoveries gave an extraordinary impulse to the study of natural history, and set the whole scientific community wondering at the paradoxical creations of the distant country known by the name of Australia. Unquestionably the most singular and anomalous of all these animals was the Ornithorhynchus, with the habits and economy of which, as well as the mode of its reproduction, we are even now, after an interval of fifty-five years, but imperfectly acquainted. It is true that Professor Owen has given an elaborate paper on its anatomy and physiology in the "Transactions of the Zoological Society of London," and that the same work contains Mr. Bennett's interesting account of his observations of the animal in a state of nature and in captivity; still I am persuaded that much more remains to be ascertained and made known respecting this extraordinary type among quadrupeds. Although the ornithology of Australia almost exclusively engrossed my attention during my interesting visit to that country, I did not fail to notice the mammals which crossed my path and by which I was always surrounded. The Ornithorhynchus especially attracted my attention, as I frequently met with it both while ascending the rivers in Van Diemen's Land and while encamped beside the quiet pools of New South Wales. I endeavoured to determine the centre of its area and to trace the extent of its range, but was not entirely successful, nor have they yet been accurately ascertained: Van Diemen's Land, and the south-eastern part of the continent from Moreton Bay to Port Philip, are the only portions of that great country whence I have received specimens, or where I have heard of it existing. In New South Wales it is common in the streams and rivers flowing from the mountain ranges to the sea, as well as in those descending towards the interior. It is equally numerous in all the tributaries which feed the great rivers Darling and Murray; and if it be not now plentiful in the Hawkesbury, Hunter, &c., the diminution in its numbers is solely due to the wholesale destruction dealt out to it by the settlers, which, if not restrained, will ere long lead to the utter extirpation of this harmless and inoffensive animal, a circumstance which would be much to be regretted; it is in fact often killed from mere wantonness, or at most for no more useful purpose than to make slippers of its skin. Some zoologists have entertained the opinion that there are more than one species of this form, and that the animal inhabiting Van Diemen's Land, with stiff wiry hairs, particularly on the tail, where they, moreover, nearly cross each other at right angles, is specifically different from that found on the continent, which is generally of a smaller size, and of which the hairy covering is more sleek and glossy; I believe, however, that no tangible specific differences will be found, and that the variations in question are due to localization alone; much variety is also found in the colouring of the under surface, but as this occurs both in island and continental specimens, it cannot be regarded as a matter of importance.

In many of its habits and actions, and in much of its economy, the *Ornithorhynchus* assimilates very closely to the Common Water Vole of this country (*Arvicola amphibius*, Desm.); frequenting as it does similar situations, climbing stumps of trees and snags which lie prostrate in the beds of rivers, and burrowing in the bank side in an upward direction, a retreat to which it resorts during the day or on the approach of danger. If it be not strictly nocturnal, it is in the early morning and evening and in lowery weather only that it is to be seen during the daytime. It swims with great ease, and frequents alike the rushy banks of the great rivers near the sea, and the silent, tranquil pools of the interior. Its mode of swimming is very singular and not always alike; sometimes the body of the animal, beaver-like, is partly raised above the surface, while at others, particularly in the still pools, every part is submerged except the upper surface of the bill and nostrils, and these being but sufficiently elevated above the water to enable the animal to breathe,