

THE AMERICAN BLACK WOLF.

The death of the last wolf seems to mark an epoch in the history of a country, of its cultivation and the complete peopling of its territories.

These animals, the rearguard of the tribes once in possession of the land, are the latest of the larger beasts of prey to be crushed out of existence by the onward march of a civilized population. Lurking in caves, amid rocks, and the most secluded parts of the remains of once extensive forests, they grow more wary as their numbers diminish, but long after the bear and the wolverine are extirpated, their gaunt forms may be occasionally seen stealing like shadows through retired parts of woodlands or broken country, seeming rather to be seeking new hiding places to elude pursuit than in search of the prey they once pursued so boldly. Wolves existed in England probably as late as the fifteenth century. In Scotland the last wolf was killed in 1680, and in Ireland in 1710. There is now at Central Park the animal of which a portrait is here given, a young black wolf, in all probability the last of a once

numerous variety common in our Southern States. He is an elegantly formed animal of a glossy jet black color and noticeably of more slender proportions than the prairie wolf with which he shares his cage. Although by no means a mature animal he is already large and promises to be a magnificent specimen of his variety. He has a long slender pointed intelligent face, erect ears, and a mild, gentle expression, which in his case at least does not belie his disposition. He was presented to the Central Park zoological collection last September, by Messrs. Auston and Stone, of Boston, who obtained him when a whelp from a back-country hunter in Louisiana. It would be interesting to see the results of a cross between this beautiful animal and some of our larger shorthaired varieties of dogs. The breed is so near extinction that this is probably the only possibility of the kind that will ever exist. Audubon tells some very readable stories of the superior bravery and strength of the southern black wolf as compared with the gray variety. Writing some fifty years ago, he says:

"There is a great feeling of hostility entertained by the settlers of the wild portion of the country toward this (black) wolf, as his strength, agility, and cunning, in which last quality he is scarcely, if any, inferior to his relative, the fox, tend to render him the most destructive enemy of thin pigs, sheep, or young calves which range the forest; therefore in our country he meets with as little mercy as in any part of the world. Traps and snares of every sort are set for catching him in those districts in which he still abounds. Being more fleet and better winded than the fox, this wolf is seldom pursued with hounds or any other dogs in open chase, unless wounded."

On one occasion, Audubon, traveling between Henderson and Vincennes, chanced to stop at the house of a farmer, for in those days hotels were scarce in the good State of Indiana. "After putting up our horses," he says, "and refreshing ourselves we entered into conversation with our worthy host, and were invited by him to visit the wolf pits which were constructed by him about half a mile from the house. Glad of the opportunity, we accompanied him across the fields to the skirts of a neighboring forest where he had three pits within a few hundred yards of each other.

They were about eight feet deep, broadest at the bottom, so as to render it impossible for the most active animal to escape from them. The mouth of each pit was covered with a revolving platform of interlaced boughs and twigs attached to a cross piece of timber which served as an axle. On this light sort of a platform, which was balanced by a heavy stick of wood fastened to the underside, a large piece of putrid venison was tied for bait. After examining all the pits we returned to the house, our host remarking he was in the habit of visiting his pits daily to see that all was right; that the wolves had been very bad that season; had destroyed nearly all his sheep and had killed one of his colts. 'But,' he added, 'I am now paying them off in full, and if I have any luck, you will see some fun in the morning.' With this expectation we retired to rest, and were all up at daylight. 'I think,' said our host, 'that all is right, for I see the dogs are anxious to get away to the pits; although they are mongrel curs, their noses are pretty keen for wolves.' As he took up his ax and gun, the dogs began to whine

lambs. As soon as he had thus disabled the wolves, he got out. Securing the platform, under his direction, in a perpendicular position on its axis, I held it while he made a slip knot in one end of a rope we had brought, and threw it over the head of one of the wolves. We now hauled the terrified animal to the surface; and motionless with fright, half choked, and disabled in its hind legs, the farmer slipped the rope from its neck and left it to the mercy of the dogs, who at once set upon it with great fury and worried it to death. The second was dealt with in the same manner, but the third showed more spirit. The moment the dogs set upon it, it scuffled along on its fore legs at a surprising rate, snapping furiously all the while at the dogs, several of which it bit severely. So well, indeed, did the brave animal defend itself that the farmer, apprehensive of its killing some of his pack, ran up and knocked it in the head with his ax. This wolf was a female and was one of the black variety." Many years ago, my grandfather, Col. Thomas Carter, traveling from New Orleans up toward the mouth of the Ohio,

was followed a long distance by an unusually large black wolf by whom he expected every moment to be attacked. His horse had fallen lame and had to be left at the last station while he himself pursued his journey on foot. This was before the advent of steamboats. The wolf kept about twenty paces behind him, never further away or nearer; if he slackened his pace the wolf walked more slowly, if he ran the wolf trotted. As evening came on, the sunset glow made its eyes shine like fire. As the colonel was not armed he feared for his life and was relieved and delighted to discover a rough log cabin in a clearing. Climbing the rail fence that inclosed it and entering at the open door he found it deserted, and used as a storehouse for flaxseed, of which it was partly full. Wrenching from what used to be a shelf a rough piece of slab containing several projecting rusty nails he stood at bay, but the wolf's instinct forbade it to come further than the rail fence, where it remained, entertaining the occupant of the cabin with an all-night serenade of the most dismal howling imaginable. Apropos of the possible reclamation of this animal from a wild state our author before quoted, Mr.

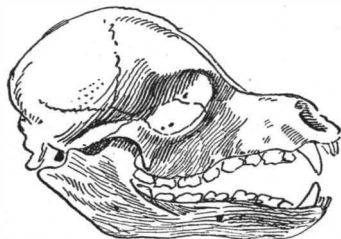
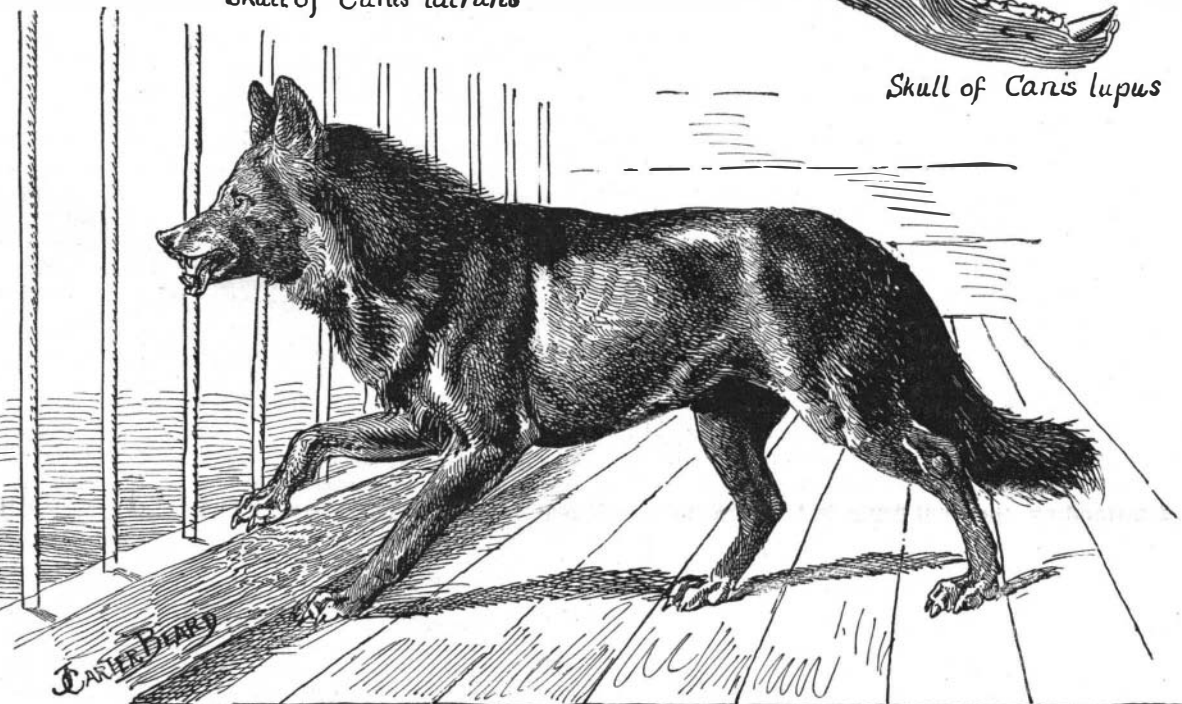
John James Audubon, says: "Once when we were traveling on foot not far from the southern boundary of Kentucky, we fell in with a black wolf following a man with a rifle on his shoulder. On speaking with him about this animal, he assured us that it was as tame and gentle as any dog and that he had never met with any dog that could trail a deer better. We were so much struck with this account and with the noble appearance of the wolf that we offered him one hundred dollars for it; but the owner would not part with it for any price."

As contrasted with this animal we give a drawing of the coyote (*Canis latrans*) and a representation of its skull as compared with that of the black wolf. It is a member of the only other genus of wolves inhabiting North America.

J. CARTER BEARD.

Fast Wheeling.

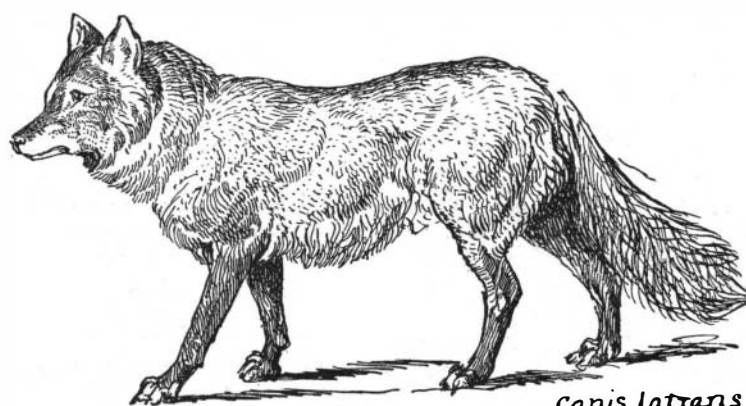
A bicycle relay run between Indianapolis, Ind., and Columbus, O., a distance of a little less than 200 miles, was made at an average speed from start to finish of a mile in 3 minutes 27½ seconds, or 17.35 miles per hour.

Skull of *Canis latrans*Skull of *Canis lupus*

THE LAST OF HIS RACE: American black wolf at Central park.



Head of black wolf

*Canis latrans*

THE AMERICAN BLACK WOLF, CENTRAL PARK, NEW YORK.

and bark and frisked about us, wild with delight. When we arrived at the first pit we found the platform somewhat injured and the bait had been disturbed, but the pit was empty. On examining the second pit we discovered three fine fellows safe enough in it, two brindled and one black, all of good size. They were lying flat to the earth, their ears close down to their heads, their eyes indicating fear more than anger. To our astonishment the farmer proposed going down into the pit to hamstringing them, in order to haul them up, and then allow them to be killed by the dogs, which, he said, would sharpen them (the dogs) up for their next encounter with wolves, should any come near his house in future. Being novices in this kind of business we begged to be lookers-on. 'With all my heart,' said the farmer; 'stand here and see how 'tis done;' whereupon he glided down a knobbed pole, taking his ax and knife with him. We were not a little surprised at the cowardness of the wolves. The farmer stretched out their legs in succession, and with a stroke of the knife cut the principal tendon above the joint, exhibiting as little fear as though he had been marking