

Natural History.

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THE AMERICAN BUFFALO.

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WE now pass to the consideration of the Family *Bovidae*, or rather such members of it as we have represented in our United States fauna, and these have already been classified and presented in my former contribution on the peccary. As I write these lines, there still exist a few living buffalo (*Bison americanus*)—old bulls, cows and young—herding in the very least frequented districts of their former domain, to yet assert themselves as being the noblest representatives of the bovine kind in this country. Miserable remnants of a race that once numbered its head by millions upon millions, and roamed over the greater part of the territorial regions now our own, even in early days extending east as far as western New York, Virginia and the Carolinas.

My own experience with these animals is quite limited. In the month of June, 1877, when accompanying a small military party, composed of one troop of cavalry, nine packers, and a dozen or more Sioux scouts, we struck at the head of Tongue River, on the north side of the Big Horn Range, a herd of sixty head of buffalo—and I joined in their chase accompanied by two soldiers and a young Sioux buck. On that occasion I killed a cow buffalo and three old bulls, when my horse played out from the run. The meat was all utilized, and packed

could put about, my horse actually reared almost into the vertical position, standing on his hindlegs, and leaving nothing for me to do but slide off the cantle of the saddle, as it was too narrow for me to retain my place upon it alone. Stepping to one side of my horse with the charging and infuriated bull not 10ft. to my front, I fired upon him, and the heavy ball took him square in the chest, bringing him to his knees, with a rush of scarlet blood from his mouth and nostrils. He tried powerfully to plunge forward, and actually succeeded in righting himself again for a charge, but I gave him another just behind the shoulder, and he rolled over dead. At this feat my horse seemed much ashamed of himself, and came snorting forward to inspect the victim of my fire. Upon examining the specimen I found it to be an old bull, apparently smaller and very much blacker than the ones I had seen killed on the plains only a day or so before; then I examined the first one I had shot, as well as others which were killed by the packer from the same bunch, and I came to the conclusion that they were typical representative of the variety known as the "mountain buffalo," a form much more active in movement, of slighter limbs, blacker and far more dangerous to attack. My opinion in the premises remains unaltered to-day. In all this I may be mistaken, but it was also the opinion held by the old buffalo hunter who accompanied me, and who at once remarked when he saw them that they were "mountain buffalo," and not the plain variety. I am well aware that this is a very different view of the matter from the one held by no less an eminent authority than Mr. J. A. Allen, who says in his exhaustive memoir on this subject ("History of the American Bison") that "there are two commonly recognized varieties of the buffalo, known respectively as the wood buffalo and the mountain buffalo. The wood buffalo is described by Hind as larger than the common bison of the plains, with

PANTHERS CLIMB TREES.

PIEGAN, Mont., May 10.—*Editor Forest and Stream:* In regard to the panther question, I can give some very positive evidence that they climb trees on certain occasions.

In the months of January and February, 1878, I hunted panthers in Brown's Tract, N. Y., with E. L. Sheppard and Edwin Arnold, two of the best-known guides of that region. We would start out, carrying provisions to last say two weeks, a blanket or two, a teapot, two axes and a rifle. Being a novice and anxious to kill a "cat," I was allowed to carry the rifle and do the shooting. Each one of us led a dog, the chains being fastened to our pack straps, and, as we wore snowshoes, we got many a fall by the dogs stepping on our shoes and tripping us.

We would strike out into the forest and travel for days, and when we found a panther track, follow it until we came up with it. But this we never did until we came to where the animal had killed a deer. The panther would be lying close by, and of course would run as soon as he heard us coming. We then turned one dog loose, and if he left the panther's track for a deer's track, as sometimes happened, we would turn another dog loose. Like all others of the cat family, the panther can run very swiftly for a short distance, but soon tires out, and then he climbs a tree. The first one I killed that winter climbed a maple tree, and crouched on a large limb about 15ft. from the ground. When we came up, the panther was watching the dog, which was barking frantically around the tree; its large eyes were a blaze of yellow light, and it switched its tail nervously to and fro. It paid no attention to us. We sat down and smoked and watched it for at least an hour, when I took a careful aim and shot it in the brain. It was a female, and measured 6ft. 6in. from tip to tip.

The next one we got after that climbed a very tall spruce, and stopped on a limb at least 40ft. from the ground. I wounded this animal mortally, and it made sad havoc with our dogs before it gave up its life. It was also a female, and measured, I believe, 7ft. 5in.

Shortly after this Mr. Sheppard and Frank Johnson killed a very large old male, which was also treed by the hounds. Others whom I know have killed panthers in trees are: Mr. B. P. Graves, Boonville, N. Y.; Mr. Verplanck C. Colvin, Albany, N. Y.; Mr. E. L. Sheppard, Boonville, N. Y.; Mr. Edwin Arnold, Boonville, N. Y.

I am very certain that adult panthers never climb trees unless pursued by dogs. Young cubs, however, do so to a certain extent in play. Mr. Graves once killed a female and two cubs, and by the tracks in the snow and the torn bark he saw that the cubs had been up and down the tree a number of times. I am also certain that panthers never climb trees and lie in wait to pounce down on passing game or children, as the newspapers often tell us is their habit. Mr. Sheppard says that at least the only place he ever knew them to do so was "around the bar room stove in the winter time."

I have often thought that I could have great sport in the mountains here if I could get two or three mongrel hounds, as "mountain lions," as we call them out here, are very plenty. J. W. SCHULTZ.

*Editor Forest and Stream:*

Last October a party of three of us from Livingston, Mont., enjoyed a fine hunt in the Crazy Mountains. The day before starting for home, we went to the top of a large foothill for pine hens, taking nothing with us but our shotguns. Having hunted all over the hill without raising a bird, we started down a ridge, my partner taking the right side and I the left. I sent my little cocker spaniel Mollie down, while I staid near the top. She worked nicely until she got near a clump of brush, and then she stopped, sniffed the air a bit, and then made a dash for the brush. As she reached the clump, a fine mountain lioness bounded out of the opposite side. The dog took after it, and it ran up a bare tree which had no limbs on it. I called for my "pard" and ran down hill. The mountain lion jumped out of the tree and ran for a large thicket, the dog still after it; and we lost it in the thicket. As soon as my friend came up we began searching for it and could not see it from outside. We then began from opposite sides to crawl into the thicket. As soon as I was able I stood up, just in time to see the lioness ready to spring on my friend. I raised my gun and taking deliberate aim shot her in the neck. She tumbled from the limb on to the ground, and after tumbling around a short time fell dead.

The marks of her claws were on the tree where she climbed up, and the limb she was lying on was not heavy enough to stand the strain of her jumping on it from the ground; and from what I saw in regard to her climbing the first tree I take my stand that the mountain lion does climb trees. She measured from tip to tip 7ft. 4 1/2 in., and was one of the largest killed in those parts. I have the hide and am getting the head mounted.

This was the first game larger than a duck I had ever shot. I used a 10 bore gun, 5 1/2 drams wood powder and 1 1/2 oz. No. 1 shot; shot her in the neck, right in the jugular—did not want to spoil the head, you know.

Mr. Ed Cook, of Livingston, was the gentleman with me on this affair, and he will corroborate my statement, and besides I believe the two trees are still there for doubting Thomases to examine. N. B.—Dog not for sale. WILL J. MACHAFFIE.

HELENA, Montana.

*Editor Forest and Stream:*

Panthers are very abundant on the McCloud River, and very destructive to stock, especially to pigs; and from the experience we have had with them here, I should say that in this region at least they very seldom climb trees. They are perfectly well able to, but they can jump into a tree so much quicker and easier than they can climb into it, that they very seldom if ever resort to climbing. I think they would consider it slow work.

The hunters here assert very positively, and stick to it, that panthers can jump to the limb of a tree twenty or thirty feet from the ground, and as all the trees about here have limbs nearer the ground than that, it is obvious that our panthers would have very little occasion to resort to the slow process of climbing. But in other parts of the country where the trees grow to a greater height without branches there is hardly a doubt, I think, that panthers climb up the trunks of the trees when necessity for it occurs. But even then I fancy that they jump the first twenty feet or more up the tree. They must certainly be able to climb trees whenever they want to, for



THE AMERICAN BUFFALO (*Bison americanus*).—AN OLD BULL.

along the mules. It was the first time I ever noticed an Indian use the sights on a Government carbine, but the young fellow that was with me put his up in the proper manner, to 200 yds., and handsomely killed an old bull at that distance across an intervening ravine. During the month of August of that year we were again on Tongue River, and met General Crook and his party, who crossed over the Big Horn Range from the Wind River country, and they reported that on the opposite side of the range they had come to close quarters with a herd of some 3,000 head. I saw none of these, as we did not cross the range that summer. Later in the same year we passed around the north side of the Big Horns, and on one occasion when west of the Big Horn River, I saw to the right of the column an old solitary bull out on the prairie, with no others in sight.

Next day I saw some of our Sioux scouts run down and kill three old bulls that formed a "herd" by themselves. These miserable Indians were loaded down with deer and antelope meat at the time, and so only took the tongues of these three noble animals. A day or so later, and we crossed a stream near Pryer's Gap, and I sighted eight buffalo up on the mountainside, and with one of the packers I started out in their pursuit. We came upon them during a fearful blizzard of heavy hail, during which our animals could barely retain their feet. In fact the packer's mule absolutely lay down on the ground rather than risk being blown down the mountain side, and my own horse, totally unable to face such a violent blow and the pelting hail, the stones being as large as big marbles, positively stood stock still facing an old buffalo bull that was not more than 25ft. in front of me. It was impossible for me to shoot as I had a double blanket over the back and sides of my head to prevent the severe punishment of the hail, and was obliged to keep my eyes on the falling limbs, which came thickly down as the entire forest roared with one continuous peal like the near firing of the very heaviest artillery. Strange to say this fearful gust did not last more than ten minutes, when it stopped as suddenly as it had commenced, and I deliberately killed my old buffalo at one shot, just where he stood, and separating two other bulls from the rest, charged them down a rugged ravine. They passed over this and into another one, but with less precipitous sides and no trees in the way, and when I was on top I noticed that the largest bull had halted in the bottom; checking my horse, an excellent buffalo hunter, I fired down at him without dismounting. The bull merely barked his shoulder, and to my infinite surprise he turned and charged me up the hill, and before I

very short, soft pelage and soft, short, incured mane, thus more resembling in these points the Lithuanian bison or arachos. It is said to be very scarce, and to be found only north of the Saskatchewan and along the flanks of the Rocky Mountains, and to never venture into the plains."

These specimens were not actually measured by me in either case, and their being considered smaller only rested upon my judging them by my eye. But they were of a softer pelage, black, lighter in limb, and when discovered were in the timber, on the side of one of the Big Horn Mountains.

It will not be my aim in the present connection to present an account of the appearance of the buffalo, as that is more or less well known, no doubt, to every reader of FOREST AND STREAM. To those who would have an exhaustive history of the animal, I can recommend no better work than the one written by Professor J. A. Allen, referred to above, and the best figures of buffaloes, known to me, are those recently published by Mr. W. T. Hornaday, in *The Cosmopolitan* (N. Y., Vol. IV., Nos. 2 and 3, 1887)—they are very life-like and deserve the thanks of every naturalist in this or any other country. The bibliography of the authoritative works upon this animal is quite extensive, including some fifty or more, and commencing with Catesby in 1743, so I will be unable to offer it in such a brief account as the present one.

We have reason to believe that in some parts of Texas quite a numerous little herd of buffalo still exist, while others are undoubtedly to be found in Wyoming and some parts of the country further to the northward. I wish that I could use language sufficiently strong, or reasons sufficiently cogent to induce our government to make the effort to secure living specimens of a dozen or more of these, and by properly caring for them, let them form a nucleus upon which to rear a stock that might pass down and increase in future ages. I much fear that my poor words will not have their weight; yet even today such a step is perfectly practicable, and would, if promptly and properly undertaken, meet with success.

The extermination of the American bison teaches us many a lesson. Aside from the fearful waste of the very best of material, it further goes to show how rapidly a species of large animal, represented by its millions, can be swept from the face of the earth; and finally, may I ask, at the end of the next hundred years, where will the paleontological student find in nature the skeleton of a buffalo? Comparatively speaking, how few have mired where their skeletons will be preserved, and how slight the chances of finding them really are.