A Fish-Eating Rodent.

A very interesting new Mammal has recently been received at the British Museum, in the form of a Fish-eating Rat from the mountain streams of Central Peru. The animal is of about the size of a common house-rat, but has a flattened head, strong and numerous whisker-bristles, and very small eyes and ears, characters which give it a striking resemblance in its physiognomy to some of the aquatic genera of the Insectivora and Carnivora, such as Potamogale, Myogale, Lutra, or Cynogale. Its swimming powers are evidently very great, as is shown, among other things, by its broad, webbed and strongly-ciliated hind feet, far better developed for this purpose than are those of the ordinary swimming Muridae, such as our English Water-vole, whose simple vegetarian diet does not necessitate the development of any exceptional swimming powers. In colour, like the common Water Shrew, it has a dark upper side with a whitish belly, and has a markedly bicolor black and white tail.

The chief interest of the new form centres in the fact of its being wholly a fish-eater, and in its having in connection therewith its incisor teeth modified for catching a slippery, active prey by the development of their outer corners into long sharp points, and its intestines altered by the reduction almost to nil of its cecum, an organ in vegetarian Muridae always of great size and capacity. The stomach of the single specimen obtained contains fish-scales, recognised by Mr. Boulenger as those of Tetragonopterus alosa, a fish whose average length is about six inches.

This animal represents quite a new departure in Rodent life-history, for although it is now perfectly well known that the North American Musquash (Fiber zibethicus) occasionally feeds on fish caught by itself, yet there is no other Rodent which, as in the case of Ichthyomys stolzmanni, as it is proposed to term the new form, wholly lives on fish, to the exclusion of a vegetable diet.

The general relationships of Ichthyomys are clearly with the ordinary South American Muridae, perhaps more especially with those of the Habrothrix group, and there is certainly no direct connection with Fiber.

The type and only known specimen of this interesting form was obtained by the Polish collector, Mr. J. Kalinowski, at Chanchamayo, Central Peru, in the course of 1891.

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