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NARRATIVE
OF A
JOURNEY TO THE SHORES
OF
THE ARCTIC OCEAN,
IN 1833, 1834, AND 1835;

UNDER THE COMMAND OF CAPT. BACK, R.N.

BY RICHARD KING, M.R.C.S. &c.

SURGEON AND NATURALIST TO THE EXPEDITION.

IN TWO VOLUMES

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DEPARTURE FROM CUMBERLAND HOUSE. 59

usual. On the following morning I embarked with Mr. Annance, and took my leave of Cumberland House. Captain Back purposed remaining till the following day, to recruit his men. In each boat sixty "pieces" were carefully packed, exclusive of the men's baggage; and the crews were thus arranged:

<i>First boat.</i>		<i>Second boat.</i>
James M'Kay.	{ Steers- men. }	George Sinclair.
Charles M'Kenzie.	{ Bow- men. }	Pierre Kanaquasse.
John Ross, David Williamson, William Mathews, Thomas Anderson, Donald M'Donald, William Rowland.	{ Middlemen. }	Hugh Carron, Thomas Mathews, Pierre Ateaster, Norman Morrison, Malcolm Smith, Olivier Seguin.

Having retraced our steps for a short distance, and being favoured by a gentle breeze, we sailed across Cumberland Lake, and encamped at the mouth of Sturgeon River. While the men were occupied in pitching our tents and preparing the supper, Mr. Annance and myself took a stroll through the woods in pursuit of some pigeons that had been seen to alight. Although we got no pigeons, we were amply compensated for our trouble in securing a beautiful

striped marmot. The interesting little animal, as if unaccustomed to the molestation of man, permitted us to approach without being disturbed, and still kept cramming its already distended pouches with seeds, which it appeared to be collecting for its winter stores; we were fortunate enough to secure it unhurt, just as it was about to retreat. The Sturgeon River is called by the Canadians *La Rivière Maligne*, from its numerous and dangerous rapids; — a name we found by experience to be extremely appropriate. The weight of our cargo was such that we had to make “two trips,”* by which the distance was trebled; while the frequent operation of forming channels for the boats, by picking up the large stones that impeded the navigation, greatly delayed us. Against the strength of a rapid it is impossible to effect any progress by rowing; the boats are consequently towed, or, if the bank will not admit of it, propelled with poles, in the management of which the “old hands” show great dexterity. Their simultaneous motions were

* By “two trips” is to be understood the making a certain distance in a boat half loaded, and, having disembarked the baggage, returning for the remainder.

timus preferring the former, and all the other species the latter. In the stomach of a black bear Dr. Richardson found the remains of a seal, a marmot, a large quantity of the sweet roots of some *astragali* and *hedysara*, together with some berries and a little grass.

The Indians and traders to a man affirm, that notwithstanding one thousand or more skins are annually procured from black bears destroyed in their winter retreats, a bear was never killed with young. The circumstance is mentioned in Pennant's Arctic Zoology,* upon the authority of both Lawson and Catesby; but it has been very improperly discredited or neglected by late writers. I have been informed that the young of the black bear have been found by the Indians not larger than a musk-rat; which, if the difference in size of the parent animals is taken into consideration, is confirmed by Hearne's account of the young of the polar bear. According to Richardson, the black bear brings forth early in January: admitting therefore the growth of these creatures for two months to be somewhat slower than other

* Vol. i. p. 60.

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In thus seeking its food, this owl is peculiar to others of the same genus, which fly in search of their prey. Like the American hawk-owl (*strix funerea*), it flies in circles round the fires of the voyageurs, and is so bold as even to attack man; when it fights with such determination as to be frequently killed with sticks. When disturbed, it takes but a short flight, seeking refuge in the dense thickets, whence it is not easily driven; although it occasionally alights in a conspicuous situation, to reconnoitre its pursuer. According to some authors, unlike other birds of prey, it lays from ten to twelve eggs; and from a fact mentioned by Bewick, that twenty-eight individuals of this species have been counted together in a turnip-field, it is supposed to assemble in flocks prior to leaving its breeding-places.

Probably the short-eared owl builds its nest in the ground-like the *strix cunicularia*, or burrowing-owl, which, according to Lucien Bonaparte,* "is seen in small flocks in the neighbourhood of its holes." The burrowing-owl, instead of inhabiting venerable ruins, or tenant-

* Lucien Bonaparte's American Ornithology, vol. i. p. 68.

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ing the sombre forests, delights to dwell on open plains, in company with animals remarkable for their social disposition, neatness, and order. Say informs us that it resides exclusively in the burrows of a species of marmot, the *arctomys Ludovicianus*, wistonwish, or prairie-dog; whose excavations are so commodious as to render it unnecessary that this bird should dig for itself. The spots selected by the marmot for its habitation are termed, to the westward of the Rocky Mountains, where they assemble in numbers, "prairie-dog villages." These villages, which are very numerous and variable in their extent, are composed of slightly elevated mounds, having the form of a truncated cone, about two feet in width at the base, and seldom rising as high as eighteen inches above the surface of the soil. The entrance is placed either at the top or on the side, and the whole mound is beaten down externally, especially at the summit, resembling a much-used foot-path. An obliquely descending passage leads to an apartment where this industrious marmot constructs a cell for its winter's sleep. It is composed of fine dry grass,

globular in form, with an opening at top capable of admitting the finger; and the whole is so firmly compacted, that it might without injury be rolled over the floor. Like others of the genus, on the approach of danger it sits erect to reconnoitre the movements of the enemy, but soon takes refuge in its subterranean chambers.

From the ruinous condition of the burrows tenanted by the *strix cunicularia*, compared with the neat and well-preserved mansion of the marmot, Say has inferred that this owl is either the unfriendly resident of the same habitation with the prairie-dog, or that it is the sole occupant of a burrow acquired by the right of conquest. As it begins its flight, it utters a note so strikingly similar to the cry of the marmot, that did not the burrowing-owls of the West Indies, where no marmots exist, utter the same sound, "it might be inferred that the marmot was the unintentional tutor to the young owl." *

The dogs and sledges being in perfect readiness by the 20th of March, Captain Back took

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twenty thousand. The graceful motions of these animals were the admiration and delight of the whole party. Nor did we witness with less pleasure the progress which vegetation had made within the few last warm days: the willows and dwarf birch in the vicinity of the various tributaries had put forth their leaves, and several flowers ornamented the ground.

As we advanced, the sandbanks decreased almost to a level with the water, and were bordered with willows, affording shelter to large flocks of Canada geese, which were unable to fly from having cast their large quill-feathers. Had it been desirable, several hundreds might have been killed without a weapon of any kind; for although they run extremely fast for a short distance, they soon become fatigued, and fall an easy prey to the nimble hunter.

The *spermophilus Parryi*, or Parry's marmot, was found here very abundantly. This spermophile inhabits the barren grounds skirt- ing the sea-coast, from Churchill, in Hud- son's Bay, round by Melville Peninsula, and the whole northern extremity of the continent to Bhering Strait, where specimens precisely

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similar were procured by Captain Beechey. It is found generally in stony districts, but seems to delight chiefly in sandy hillocks amongst rocks, where burrows inhabited by different individuals may be often observed crowded together. One of the society is generally seen sitting erect on the summit of the hillock, whilst the others are feeding in the neighbourhood. Upon the approach of danger, the watchful sentinel gives the alarm, and they instantly betake themselves to their holes,—remaining chattering, however, at the entrance until the advance of the evening obliges them to retire to the bottom. When their retreat is cut off, they become much terrified, and, seeking shelter in the first crevice that offers, they not unfrequently succeed in hiding the head and fore part of the body only; whilst the projecting tail is, as is usual with them when under the influence of terror, spread out flat on the rock. Their cry in this season of distress strongly resembles the loud alarm of the Hudson's Bay squirrel, and is not very unlike the sound of a watchman's rattle. The Esquimaux name of the animal, "Seek, seek," is an at-

tempt to express the sound. According to Hearne, they are easily tamed, and are very cleanly and playful in a domestic state. They are supposed to feed upon vegetables, as their pouches were invariably observed to be filled, according to the season, with tender shoots of herbaceous plants, berries of the Alpine arbutus and of other trailing shrubs, or the seeds of grasses and leguminous plants;—a sufficient quantity of which provision they lay up for the winter.

After passing a wide opening to the left, caused by a river which was called after Captain Sir Samuel Warren of Woolwich Dockyard, the land sensibly increased in height, occasionally diversified by mounds of sand. Another large tributary, named Jervoise River, was seen flowing from the right; when the stream for a short distance made a bend to the northward, interrupted by two rapids, and then followed its more general north-easterly course. Beyond this spot the river diminished in breadth, but increased in velocity, until we reached a mass of rocks, consisting of a reddish granitic compound approaching to gneiss; when,