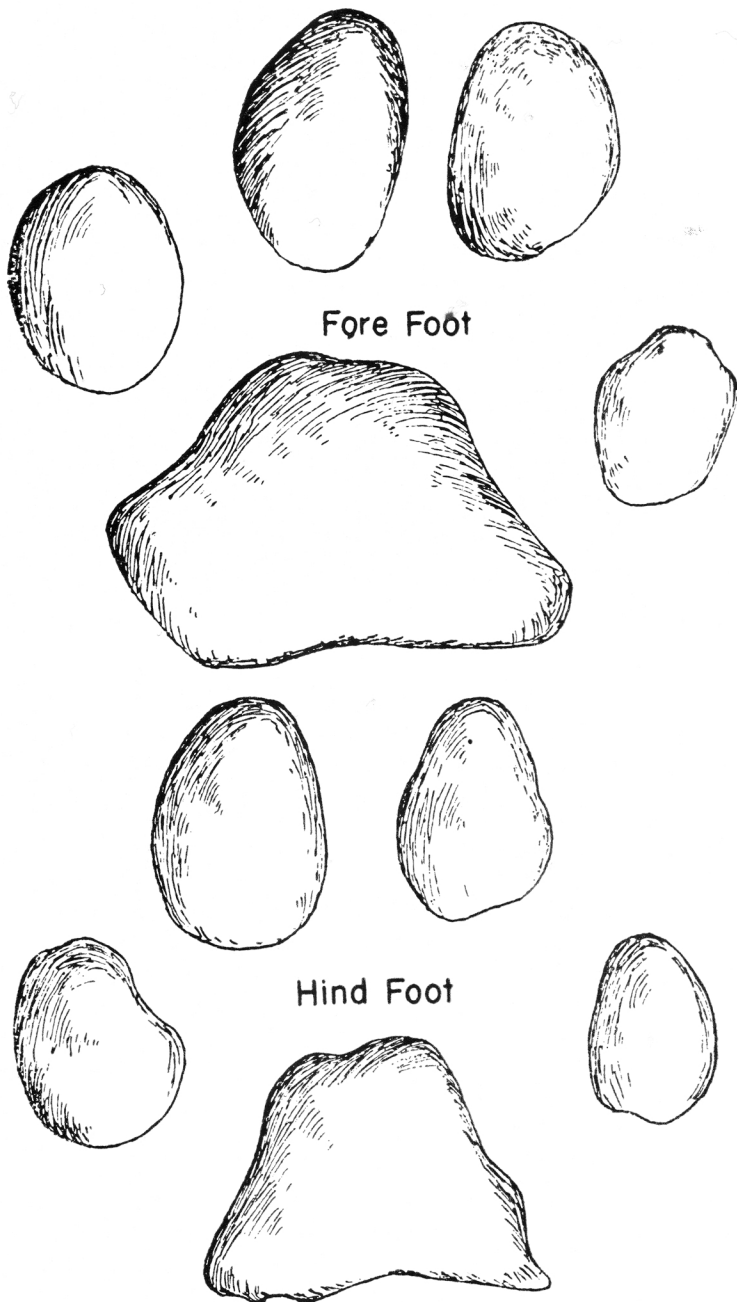


Panther

The panther, *Felis concolor*, is a beast of many names, most frequently referred to in New Hampshire history as catamount, but sometimes known locally as "Indian Devil" or "Carcajou," under which appellations it is confused with the wolverine, which may have never existed in the state. In other parts of the country it is variously called mountain lion, cougar or puma, the latter name has been generally adopted.

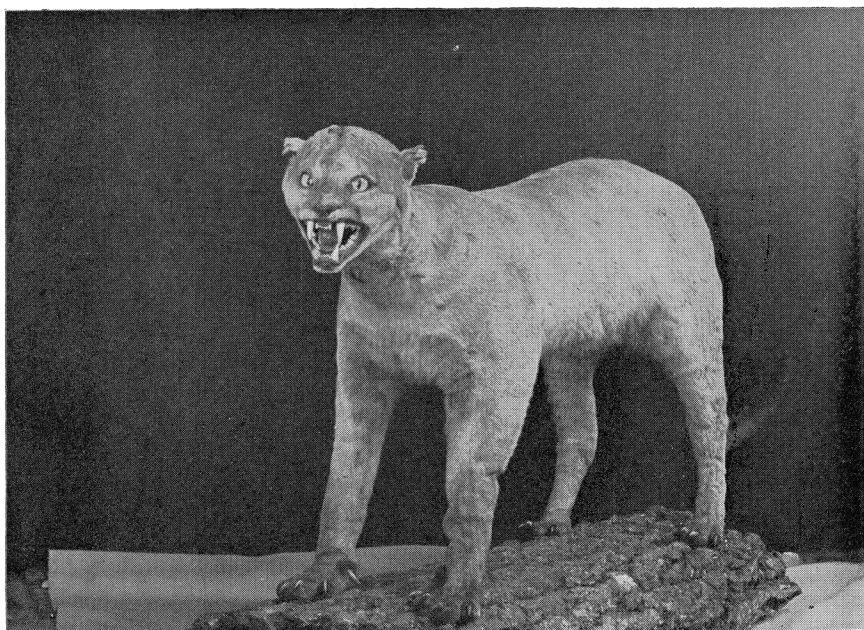
The voice of the panther has been variously described, and many of the inhuman screams attributed to it originate from other sources, notably owls. Panthers are reputedly less noisy than the commoner wildcats or lynx.

Tracks made while walking show the hind foot impression about two inches ahead of that of the front foot. Claw marks rarely show. The characteristic fuzzy appearance of lynx tracks (which they most



Reproduced from *The Puma, Mysterious American Cat*, Stanley P Young and Edward A. Goldman, The American Wildlife Inst., Wash., D C., 1946, by permission of the publishers

Fig XIX

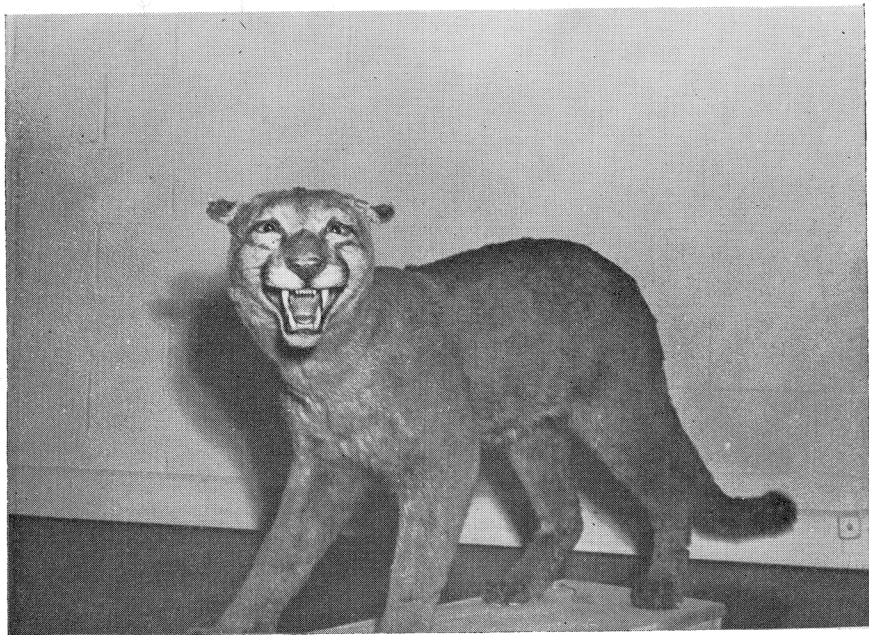


This incredible creature is the only existing specimen of New Hampshire panther Located at the Woodman Museum, Dover, N H., an accompanying inscription reads: 'This Felis Couguar, sometimes called Mountain Lion, was killed in Lee, N H., by Wm Chapman of Newmarket, N H who was hunting foxes late in the fall of 1853, accompanied by his dogs

closely resemble) produced by hair between the pads, is absent in the tracks of the panther A life-size diagram of an average track is shown in Fig. XIX.

According to Cahalane (1947), the panther prefers to still hunt, seldom lying in wait to leap down upon its prey It stalks game in much the same manner as a domestic cat, its great weight serving to knock over its prey, crushing smaller animals and often breaking the necks of deer It easily kills sheep, hogs, goats or colts, and can, if necessary, kill horses or steers. Fresh meat is preferred, and if food is plentiful a fresh kill may be made each night. The remains of the carcass are usually carefully covered, and the cat may return to finish it later The panther seldom feeds on the kills of other species.

The Eastern panther, *Felis concolor couguar*, one of the larger sub-species, was found in New Hampshire at time of settlement, but has been regarded as extinct by most authorities for many years. It was a slender, long-tailed cat, probably tawny or light brown in color. Preble (1942) indicates that the color of New Hampshire panthers was unknown, but a specimen now located in the Woodman Museum at



This specimen was taken at Wardsboro, Vt., in 1875 Located at The Boston Museum of Science.

Dover, N H., is of a very light fawn shade without markings. Until recently this has received little care, and has been exposed to the light of a century

A better example of the Eastern panther is that taken at Wardsboro, Vt., in 1875, and now in possession of the Boston Museum of Science. This specimen is somewhat darker than the Woodman Museum panther — practically the same shade as a deer — lighter below, blending to a reddish brown along the backbone, with reddish brown markings around the eyes and muzzle, and on the end of the tail. The coat appears to be somewhat mottled, but this is the effect of shadows rather than specific markings.

The New Hampshire specimen measured eight feet four inches when killed, and weighed 198 pounds. The Vermont panther was smaller, weighing 110 pounds, and measuring seven feet three inches overall. Height of the latter is thirty-three inches at the shoulder Present measurements of the New Hampshire panther are meaningless, since the skin was badly distorted in mounting.

The New Hampshire panther was a male, and newspapers, at the time of the Vermont kill, referred to the animal as "he.

Panthers, or catamounts as they were more generally called in

Colonial times, have always been rare in New Hampshire. Local historians who intimate that they "abounded," filling the nights with the terror of their horrid screams, are guilty of understandable exaggeration. As the illustrations indicate, even dead these many years, they are impressive. The most limited number was indeed an abundance — of panthers — and doubtless made even the primitive wilderness seem a little crowded.

Catamount records for the state are fairly common, but it must be remembered that the pioneers did not kill one every day. When they did, it was a memorable event, and every kill was recorded at least once, and usually a good deal oftener.

Very few of the settlers ever saw a panther, and even the earliest travellers to New England rarely had first hand experience with them. "Concerning Lyons, I will not say that I ever saw any myself, but some affirm that they have seen a Lyon at Cape Anne. Plymouth men have traded for Lyons skinnes in former times" (Wood 1634).

"1639, June the Six and twentieth day. At this time we had some neighbouring Gentlemen in our house, who came to welcome me into the Countrey: where amongst variety of discourse they told me of a young Lyon (not long before) killed at Piscataway (N. H.) by an Indian." (Josselyn 1674).

Until its disappearance in the late 19th century, the panther's range extended over the whole state. Even where they are common panthers are seldom seen and difficult to hunt. In spite of man's best efforts to eradicate them, they held on at least into the 1880's.

Several records come from the south-central part of New Hampshire around Manchester. Two Martin brothers, living at Martin's Ferry, killed one with a club and axe in the early days of settlement. In Goffstown, childhood home of Gen. John Stark, Cedar Swamp was the home of deer, bear, wolves and catamount. Here, Stark and a friend killed one of the big cats. Col. John Goffe treed and shot one near Catamount Brook, from which incident the stream derives its name. At a later date, Matthew Patten and Robert Walker of Bedford killed another in the Bog, in the southwest part of New Boston (Potter 1856).

The Patten-Walker kill is described by Woodbury, Savage and Patten (1903) as having occurred near the "Uncanoonuck Hills." Goffe's experience is again recorded in the "History of Weare" (Little 1888).

Potter mentions the taking of the specimen now at the Woodman Museum. "Extensive bogs and swamps occurred on the brooks leading into the Merrimack, Cohas and Massabesic. . . The bear, catamount, moose, deer, wolf, wildcat, lynx, black cat or fisher and other animals of less notoriety were formerly found within our limits. . . A catamount was seen in this neighborhood some two years since, which killed a

number of dogs in the adjacent town of Goffstown. This doubtless was the same animal killed at Lee."

In Cheshire County, near the Connecticut River, Col. Bellows killed two bear and a catamount on the same day in 1772 (Aldrich 1880) At Swanzey, two early settlers shot a catamount which had been discovered by their dog in a ledge (Reed 1892).

From Troy, adjoining the town of Swanzey, comes the following account, long accepted as authentic because it gives the final disposition of the specimen, even to the price received. "The catamount was the most ferocious of all the wild beasts of New Hampshire His great size, strength and agility of movement, together with his formidable weapons rendered him the terror both of man and beast, and when provoked, no animal could stand before him. Fortunately but a few such monsters have ever been seen within the limits of our town.

"One of the most remarkable of this class of animals was once killed by Deacon Fife, near his house. Soon after settling here, his father came to make him a visit. . . One day . . . they discovered a deer that had just been killed by some unknown monster . . ."

The Fifes procured a large steel trap, and, on returning, found the deer had disappeared except for the heart and liver. The trap was set, and the next morning it contained a catamount. "The animal was a very large one, and measured thirteen feet and four inches from his nose to the end of his tail. The skin was stuffed and afterwards sold to the proprietors of the Boston Museum for forty-five dollars" (Stone 1897).

This story, originally recorded by Caverly (1859), may be without basis in fact. This writer went to considerable trouble to check the present whereabouts or ultimate disposition of Deacon Fife's panther. The Deacon was one of the first settlers of Troy, moving there in 1765. The old Boston Museum (the only one in existence at the time of Stone's writing) was established in 1841. Well over a half-century must have elapsed between the killing of the panther and its acquisition by the museum — if it ever went there.

The entire collection of the old Boston Museum, complete with records, became the property of the present Boston Museum of Science. A careful check of the records reveals no panther from New Hampshire. Two specimens, only, are listed — the Wardsboro panther described earlier, and a second taken in Rhode Island in 1847 or 48. The latter could not be located at the time of the writer's visit.

There was a possibility that the name of the museum had been incorrectly given by Caverly. Inquiries directed to other important museums in the East have, however, been unproductive.

Other towns in the vicinity of Troy — Dublin, Temple, Peterboro, Richmond and Hancock — report panthers present or killed around the time of settlement (Hoover unpub.). An early record from the southeast corner of the state comes from Rockingham County, where a panther was killed at Catamount Rock on the east side of the town of Windham (Morrison 1883).

A story of the type which casts a shadow of suspicion on panther tales is related in the "History of Andover" (Eastman 1910). It concerns one John Morey who, hunting near Kearsarge Mountain, throttled a catamount with his bare hands, and torn and bloody, but victorious, trudged home with his prize over his shoulder, its nose dragging on the ground behind him. The kill may have been authentic, but, if the circumstances have not been exaggerated, the modern reader has no appreciation of the calibre of the Moreys.

Panthers are said to have been present before settlement in the vicinity of Berlin. They occasionally wandered through Lancaster, and, in 1832, one lived there for nearly a year until killed on Mt. Prospect (Somers 1898).

Allen (1876) writes "the capture during the last ten years of an occasional individual in the Green Mountains and in the forest regions of northern New Hampshire and Maine shows that it still lingers in northern New England.

Jackson (1922) reports a panther killed in the White Mountains about 1885. This may have been the same which Leonard Hawes, of Pittsburg, remembers seeing when he was a boy. It was taken on the Magalloway in the late 1880's by William Holman of Dixfield, Maine.

Merriam recorded the presence of panther in Vermont in 1904; they were seen or taken in that state up to 1909, although the last bounty was paid in 1896. One was killed near Mt. Kineo in Maine, in 1906. Jackson mentioned a pair which ranged the east side of the Androscoggin in Cambridge, New Hampshire, to the south shores of Umbagog in Maine, in the early 1920's (Preble 1942).

The State of New Hampshire has never offered a bounty for this species. The original cat bounty of \$3.00 for "any species of naturally wild cat" was in effect only one year, the law being amended in 1809 to cover only "Siberian Lynx." It is not on record that anyone ever collected on a panther. Only one local bounty regulation has been discovered, Gilmanton, in 1788, voted to pay nine pounds for catamount (Lancaster 1845).

Although the Eastern panther has been considered extinct by most authorities, "the present status is a matter of considerable speculation" (Preble 1942). A short article from the *Journal of Mammalogy* (6.3) is interesting enough to be quoted almost in entirety

"There are rumors of a lone panther seen now and again in northern New England. A reward has been offered for its capture. I wish, instead, some means had been taken for its protection. To kill an individual of any rare species I consider an unpardonable crime I believe that it is possible that there may be a lone panther or two roaming the woods to the north of us. Thirty years ago, the rumor of a wild cat or deer being seen anywhere in southern New Hampshire was hooted at. Now both species are common enough wherever there are woods for their cover

"I recall telling an old trapper that I found tracks which I was sure were otter tracks along Exeter River and Old River in Hampton Falls. He replied that he had trapped minks and muskrats along both streams all his life, and if ever an otter had been along there he guessed he should have known it. Within the next two years I trapped four otters, shot one which I lost, and saw others within two miles of where that old trapper lived. He was a keener observer than I have ever been but, believing otters to be extinct here, he failed to see their sign" (Cram 1925).

Prof. C. F. Jackson, of the University of New Hampshire, refuses to believe with certainty that the panther is extirpated from New Hampshire. In conversation with this writer in the summer of 1953, Dr. Jackson said he feels that there are no regular residents, but that they may sometimes travel through. They are known to have existed in New Brunswick and Maine within recent years, and Jackson is convinced that he saw panther tracks on the shore of a pond in Maine, judging the weight of the animal that made them to have been excessive for any other cat. He also feels that many of the stories are too much in accord to be the products of imagination.

Rumors of panthers persist, and reports of sightings are continually received at the Department. Often these originate with apparently reliable, intelligent persons, some of them with considerable knowledge of wildlife and woodsmanship. The stories are presumed to result from misidentification of wildcats or lynx, although such an error is hard to understand. The clean jowls, sleeker lines, unmarked coat and much greater size of the panther, and particularly its long, thick tail, would seem to make confusion with either of the two smaller cats impossible.

Some of the alleged panthers have certainly been fisher. Most New Hampshire people are familiar with wildcats and lynx, but few have seen either fisher or panther. Fisher sightings are easily weeded out — the strange animal is described as quite small (the size of a fox), black, cat-like, and having a long tail. Other descriptions fit no species except panther, ever known in this region. In a few cases there has been de-

liberate attempt to hoax, even to the extent of faking strange and wonderful tracks.

The number of panthers reported could not exist, and never have existed, here. That there may be an occasional one is lent some credence by the investigations of Wright (1953) who reports from New Brunswick in recent years, 105 sight records, 36 track records, 15 records of kills attributed to panthers, 21 voice records, and 5 specimens taken. He includes a photograph of a skin of one of the latter. Also included in his report are numerous records from Nova Scotia, Quebec, and several of the Northeastern States, among which are Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont. Due to the distance from New Brunswick, these New England records were not personally checked by Wright.

He writes that a plaster cast of a panther track made about 1935, in Vermont, was identified by the American Museum of Natural History,* and that Charles Larned Robinson of Intervale, N. H., has conducted a search for records and track reports in this state, accumulating considerable information.

Attempts to contact Robinson were unsuccessful. A letter to him produced no reply although it was not returned by the Post Office. Wright, however, kindly supplied the records collected by Robinson. They consist of newspaper accounts of panther sightings in the northeastern and southwestern sections of New Hampshire, and a number of sworn statements identifying as panthers, strange animals which had been seen. Identifications were made from a photograph provided by Robinson. Attached to these are sworn statements made by Robinson, to the effect that the persons making the identifications were known to him as reliable. None of the observers were trained in the field of wild-life or had previous familiarity with panthers.

Localities from which these records issued coincide with those from which this writer has received numerous similar reports from persons unconnected with Robinson.

Attempts to authenticate panther reports have produced no indisputable evidence of their presence. A single track of questionable value was discovered. In March, 1955, a large, tawny, long-tailed cat was reportedly observed in Canterbury. The report was not received for 10

*In response to a letter from this writer concerning this identification, T. Donald Carter of the American Museum of Natural History replied as follows. "We have two casts received from Vermont. (The first) taken during the summer of 1941 is not very distinct and could have been made by a dog.

The second made in December 1934, is a much better sample. This track is exceedingly cat-like and measures over four inches each way. Dr. Edward A. Goldman, who was very skeptical about the panthers of the northeast, and who happened into my office, would not express himself that it was a puma, but did say that if he had seen that track in Arizona, he would have unquestionably have called it the foot print of a mountain lion. All of us at the museum agreed it was neither dog nor bear and certainly had every appearance of a mountain lion."

days after the sighting, and three more days elapsed before the track was picked up some six miles from where the animal was seen. Snow had fallen in the interim, and there was a heavy crust. Dogs in the area had not broken through, nor did the unidentified animal except when jumping. For the most part only faint marks were left on the snow's surface, and tracking for any distance was impossible. A single, not-very distinctive cast was secured. The track measured four inches in diameter, either way, and was unmistakably that of a cat. A lynx in that area would be unusual, but can not be ruled out. Nor did the size preclude the possibility that it had been made by a lynx. Only the report of the sighting by a reputable and experienced hunter justified further investigation.

The cast was forwarded to Wright in New Brunswick, who expressed the opinion that it was made by either a panther or a lynx — which, he could not determine from a single cast. At his suggestion, it was mailed to Stanley P. Young of the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Washington, D. C., who replied as follows: "It is regrettable that the cast was not made (on the morning of the sighting), when undoubtedly a much better imprint could have been obtained. The characteristic features that one would look for in the determination of whether or not it might be a puma are very indistinct in the cast, and as I have stated makes it impossible to pin down anything definite with respect to it

"If . . . better casts might be obtained of the animal we will be very happy to have them sent on here. . . ."

No panther has been taken in New Hampshire since the 19th century, and no photographs or identifiable tracks have been obtained. The writer has investigated countless reports without turning up definite evidence. The experience of William E. Green of Fairlee, Vt., formerly of Orford, N. H., has been similar. Before coming to New Hampshire, Green was a trapper with the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service in the West, and has hunted cats all over the Western Hemisphere. He owns two captive panthers, one of which is a pet. It would be difficult to find one better qualified to recognize panther sign. Some of the "tawny" animals he has investigated have been whitetail deer. He says that, except where dog tracks have been misidentified, the tracks were made by a lynx. He believes the New Brunswick panthers are lynx, and that the "tail drag" in the snow is the scuff mark of a big lynx.

However, if the panther has returned to New Brunswick, caution against too emphatic a denial of its possible existence here is indicated. The principal cause for its disappearance has been removed. An adult panther requires about eight pounds of meat to fill its stomach (Dixon 1925), and its most important food species is deer. Panthers undoubtedly

helped to control the herds of deer, moose and caribou, as well as populations of smaller animals and birds in primeval New Hampshire. Scarcity of food, rather than hunting, was probably the limiting factor. With deer again abundant, there is no reason why the Eastern panther should not stage a come-back *unless*, as so many have written, it is extinct.

Lynxes

Two species of lynx are found in New Hampshire — the bay lynx, *Lynx rufus rufus*, commonly known as wildcat or bobcat, and the much rarer Canadian lynx, *Lynx canadensis canadensis*, usually called simply lynx.

In size they are similar, although the lynx appears larger. The weight record for bobcat in this state is 51 pounds (N. H. Fish & Game Dept. 1935). This specimen was a male taken in the Indian Stream Valley in Coos County, in 1927. Overall length was 51 $\frac{3}{8}$ inches. It is now in possession of the New England Museum of Natural History. Another from Coos County, taken in the winter of 1953, weighed 43 pounds and measured 52 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches. The heaviest of 74 bobcats from Vermont examined by Hamilton (1943) weighed 36 pounds.

Upper weight limit for lynx is around 40 pounds (Hamilton 1943). There are no exceptionally large specimens from New Hampshire on record.

The wildcat is more adaptable and often found in swampy woodlands or mountainous areas adjacent to farms, while the lynx is at home only in dense coniferous forests (Hamilton 1943). Lynx are occasionally taken as far south as Hillsboro or Merrimack Counties, but their range is ordinarily confined to the northern half of the state, especially the White Mountain region. (See Fig. XX) Depending heavily for food on the cyclic hare and rabbit, populations of both lynx and wildcat are subject to marked fluctuations.

Colonial history makes no distinction between the two species. Wood (1634) was describing the wildcat (which he called the "ounce") when he wrote "The English kill many of these, accounting them very good meate. Their skinnes be a very deepe kind of Furre, spotted white and black on the belly." The lynx has no definite dark markings on the belly, but the wildcat, as Wood says, is spotted underneath with black.

Morton (1637) had another name for it. "The Luseran, or Luseret, is a beast like a Catt, but so bigg as a great hound with a taylor shorter than a Catt. His claws are like a Catts. Hee will make a pray of the Deare. His Flesh is danty meat, like a lamb his hide is a choise furre, and accompted a good commodity."