

(2) **Native cat. Common native cat.***DASYURUS VIVERRINUS* (Shaw, 1800).

In form the animal is lithe and graceful; it is lightly built, and its whole appearance is that of an agile, active, predatory carnivore.

The fur is thick and soft. The under fur is dense and fine, and except where the coat is spotted with white it is dark slate coloured. The colour of the general body fur is olive grey, warming slightly towards the sides, and markedly towards the tail, to a yellowish or rufous grey. The dorsal surface has often a distinctly greenish tinge which becomes yellowish or ruddy towards the basal portion of the tail. The ventral surface of the body, and the inner sides of the limbs, are pale grey, yellowish, or white. The fur of the general body surface is irregularly spotted with white. Some 50 to 60 spots, ranging in size from mere specks of a few white hairs to irregular blotches about the size of a sixpence, are present on most specimens. The spotting is inconspicuous on the face and head; it is absent also from the free portions of the limbs, and the tail is invariably spotless.

The head and face are paler than the body, and are distinctly grizzled. The tail is markedly more rufous than the rest of the body, and the terminal tuft of hair is pale yellow or white. The manus and pes are white or pale yellowish grey.

The tail is considerably shorter than the head and body; it is cylindrical and somewhat bushy in its basal portion, but towards the extremity the hair shows a very distinct tendency to form a dorsal crest. The ears are large, somewhat rounded in outline, and in the living animal they are carried folded. Fine white or pale yellow hairs clothe the backs of the ears and form a slight fringe on their margins. Within, the ears show a rim of fine hair round the edges, and a fine linear tract of hair along the line of folding. The processus antihelicis is large and broad, and presents a thick rounded margin. (See Figure 52.)

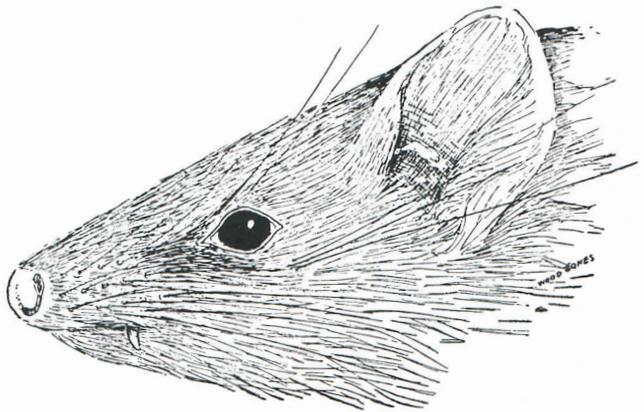


FIGURE 52.—Head of *Dasyurus viverrinus* from a male specimen. Natural size.

The rhinarium is naked, granular, and pink in colour in the living animal. It is cleft in its lower portion where it joins the upper lip. The eyes are fairly large. The iris is brown, the pupil circular. Eyelashes are well developed. The mystacial vibrissae are mostly dark in colour; they measure 60mm. as a maximum, and they are arranged in 6 rows. There are 2 or 3 strong dark supraorbital vibrissae, a tuft of about half a dozen long dark hairs in the genal set, a few pale submentals,

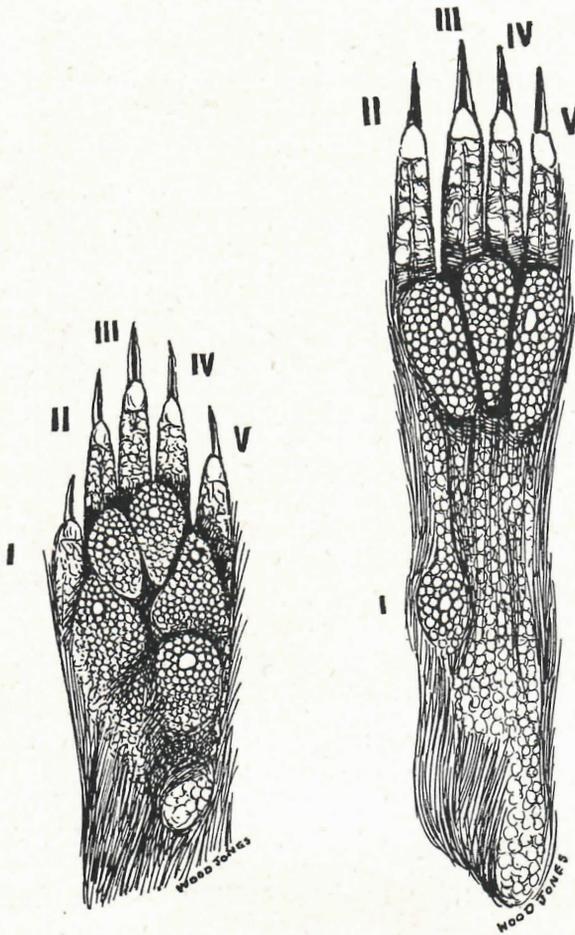


FIGURE 53.—Left manus and pes of *Dasyurus viverrinus*.
Twice natural size.

ated granulations. A small pad marks the site of the absent 1st digit. The digital formula is $3 > 4 > 2 > 5$. (See Figure 53).

The pouch is somewhat shallow. The nipples are 6 in number, and are arranged in two crescentic rows.

The olive grey type, which is described above, is not the only colour variety of the species; for a melanistic form, in which the coat is black spotted with white; and a dark form, in which the body colour is brown spotted with white, occur in company with, and according to Gould, in the litters of the more ordinary type.

The skull is rather lightly built. (See Figure 54). The brain case is considerably larger in proportion to the size of the skull than in *D. maculatus*. The distance from the front of the first molar to the back of the third molar is about 14mm. The bullae are spherical and not elongated as they are in *D. maculatus*. (See Figure 55).

and a cluster of 4 or 5 white interramals. The ulnar carpal vibrissae, 3 or 4 in number, are well developed, and are white or pale yellow in colour. A single medial antebrachial bristle is well marked in most specimens.

The palmar surface of the manus is naked, granular, and flesh-coloured. There are 5 well developed pads. The thenar pad is merged with the first interdigital, the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th interdigital, and the hypothenar pads complete the series. In the centre of each pad is a large smooth granulation; this central granulation shows no trace of striations. The claws are strong and sharp. The digital formula is $3 > 4 > 2 > 5 > 1$. (See Figure 53).

The sole of the pes is naked, granular, and flesh-coloured like the palm. There are 3 well developed pads with central unstriated

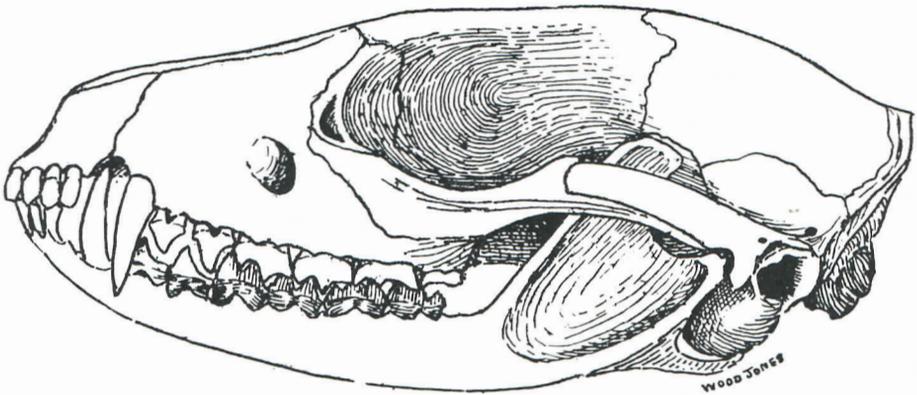


FIGURE 54.—Skull of *Dasyurus viverrinus*. Twice natural size. From a South Australian specimen.

DIMENSIONS.

	1. Ogibly.	2. Brit. Mus. ♂	3. Brit. Mus. ♀	4. Water- house.	5. N.S.W. ♂	6. Water- house.	7. S. Aus. ♂
Head and body	457	440	400	381	350	305	285
Tail	305	290	210	215	200	228	165
Hind foot	—	65	60	70	49	52	45
Ear	—	28	27	37	32	32	25

DIMENSIONS OF SKULL.

	Waterhouse.		Brit. Mus.	Waterhouse.		N.S.W.	South Australia.			
	♂	♀								
Length	79	75	75	74	73	72	64	58	56	55
Breadth	49	45	47	45	44	44	38	36	35	34
Length of nasals	32	28	31	26	25	29	23	20	20	19
Length of palate	46	41	45	41	41	41	36	35	33	32

From the absence of the hallux, and the granular surface of the palm and sole, we would imagine that *D. viverrinus* was by no means so strictly an arboreal animal as is *D. maculatus*. It was at home in a wide variety of habitats, and frequently took up its abode in the neighbourhood of human dwellings. It was abundant round, and even in the immediate precincts of, the larger Australian towns. Twenty years ago it was exceedingly common about Adelaide. Still more recently it lived close to Melbourne; and to-day it is not uncommon in the suburbs of Sydney. It inhabited treeless rocky country as well as the more cultivated

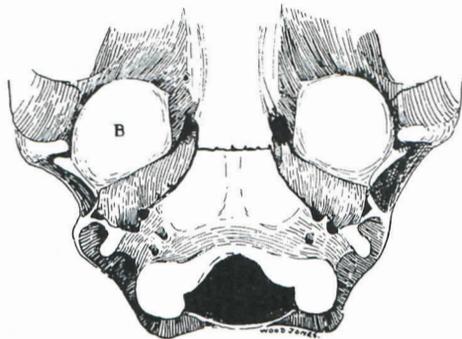


FIGURE 55.—Underside of the posterior end of the skull of *Dasyurus viverrinus*. The Bulla on the left side of the figure is marked B. Twice natural size. Compare with Fig. 51.

districts, and everywhere evinced a preference for dwelling around homesteads and in the immediate neighbourhood of chicken runs. Very early in the days of colonisation it was regarded with dislike because of the damage it did by killing poultry; but there are many settlers who would now welcome its return in order to keep the mice plagues within check.

The Native Cat is an absolutely fearless animal, and one which possesses all the bold intelligence of the typical predatory carnivorous animal. It is an attractive creature in captivity, and is by no means difficult to handle and render familiar. Although it will kill and eat poultry, it is contented with far smaller game, and probably depends very largely upon insects as its main source of food. For the greater part of the day the animal sleeps with its ears folded down, and its activities commence only at dusk; then, after a cautious approach, it springs upon any victim with astonishing rapidity, and kills, as a rule, by a bite across the back of the head. There is no doubt that as a destroyer of mice, rats, and young rabbits the Native Cat played an extremely useful part in Australian rural economy, and despite the fact that it was an occasional robber of hen roosts its presence was a real asset to the country.

Its range in South Australia was formerly very wide. On Kangaroo Island it appears to have been always more or less of a rarity; but from the accounts of old wallaby trappers there seems to be no doubt as to its existence on the island. Since the snares set for the wallaby and the opossum are not particularly likely to capture a *Dasyure*, and as the animal's skin is of no commercial value, it is not impossible that its scarcity on the island is more apparent than real. By the South Australian Murray River natives it was known as NG'RUI MOCH (many spots), and 30 years ago it haunted the shores of the river and lakes, being there very partial to a fish diet. To-day, if it exists at all in this State, it must be an animal of the utmost rarity. Although there is no doubt that the influences which have been at work in the general process of the extermination of the Australian fauna have operated to the full on the Native Cat; it is possible that another factor has come into play during the final scene of its passing. The animal has been trapped, poisoned and persecuted throughout the country; and yet if we turn to the case of the European weasel in New Zealand we may learn how little effect these means have on the extermination of an active and intelligent carnivore. The Native Cat, with its cunning and its activity, was well able to look after itself, despite the fact that it was an extremely easy animal to trap. Its rapid decrease started about the year 1900, and during that and the two following years the so-called "common" Native Cat practically disappeared from South Australia. Much the same thing happened in Victoria and in New South Wales, with the exception of the district immediately round Sydney. It would seem certain that some epidemic disease must have spread through the *Dasyures*, and that after a lapse of twenty years the remnant has not succeeded in re-establishing itself. In the Animal Protection Act of 1919 the Native Cat is not even mentioned. The evil or the good that it did has ceased to be a factor of any economic importance.