

UNUSUAL COAT COLORS IN SOME WILD AMERICAN CARNIVORES

DONALD F. HOFFMEISTER

Museum of Natural History, University of Illinois, Urbana

Undescribed coat colors in wild carnivores are few. However, examples of melanistic ringtails, *Bassariscus astutus*, and albinistic mink, *Mustela vison*, have recently been seen.

Bassariscus astutus. — Ringtails are not recorded as having dark color-phases. However, two individuals recently obtained, a male and female, are exceptionally dark and as dark as or darker than the silver phase of the red fox, *Vulpes vulpes*. These two ringtails were taken by a fur-trapper within a 25 mile radius of Llano, Texas. They were sent to the Maas and Steffen Fur Company, St. Louis, Missouri, where Mr. E. C. Steffen, Jr., saw five others, equally dark, during the same fur season of 1959-1960.

The entire dorsum and sides of these animals are black. The normally white patches below the ear and around the eye are brownish. The light-colored "rings" on the tail are more nearly cream than white. The underparts, instead of being a creamy color, are a mixture of black, gray, and brown, with the brown primarily along the midline and in the inguinal region. When the dark hair on the back is parted, the underfur appears lead-colored, only slightly darker than in the "wild type".

This melanistic or silver phase appears to be uncommon. In the 1959-1960 fur season, Mr. Steffen had handled 17,437 ringtails by May 6, 1960, and had seen only seven such individuals. This would be one

"silver" in about every 2500 wild type. In previous years dark ringtails were seen in about this same ratio.

All seven of the "silvers" are from a relatively small area in central Texas: near Junction, Fredericksburg, Stonewall, Marble Falls, and Llano.

Mustela vison.—Mink, reared in captivity as fur-farmed animals, are known to display numerous mutations affecting coat color. However, in the wild, such variants are rarely or never encountered, except in those few cases where mutant ranch-mink have escaped and bred with wild mink. In the 1959-1960 fur season, Steffen and Maas Fur Company obtained a light-colored, almost white, mink taken by Mr. Carl W. Evon along a creek at Manukutak, Dillingham, Alaska. This mink has white underfur but the guard hairs are tipped with a light yellowish brown, giving the animal a uniform frosting of a color similar to but much more dilute than in "New Zealand" of rabbits. The animal appears to be whitish, but it obviously is not an albino. Of the various mutations described by Shackelford (Genetics of the ranch mink, 1950, Pilsbury Publ., Inc., N. Y., 91 pp.), *albino* (c^{Hc^H}) and dominant white (SS or FfSSs) would seem closest to this wild-taken specimen. The color of the Dillingham specimen fits the description of neither of these exactly, however, and probably the animal has a different genotype.



Fig. 1.—Dorsal and ventral views of melanistic and normally colored ringtails, *Bassariscus astutus* (x 2/11). Left to right: UI, no. 22700, near Llano, Texas; UI, no. 15158, Tucson Mts., Arizona; UI, no. 22699, near Llano, Texas; UI, no. 5825, Graham Mts., Arizona.

About 10 years earlier, the same fur company obtained another light-colored mink, somewhat like the Dillingham specimen but more yellowish. This was taken about 200 miles north, on the Yukon River near Holy Cross, Alaska. In nearly 30,000 wild mink from Alaska handled by Mr. Steffen over the last 15 years, these two are the only mutants he recalls. His father, handling Alaskan mink for the past 50 years, saw only one other light-colored mutant.

A "white" mink, caught at New Baltimore, southwestern Ohio, in May, 1960, was brought to Mr. W. W. Goodpaster, a taxidermist and naturalist in Cincinnati, to prepare as a mounted specimen. This specimen is cream-colored but an albino, with pink eyes. The mink was chased by a domestic cat into a stone pile where the mink was netted. This would be a peculiar behavior for a mink with normal vision.

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