

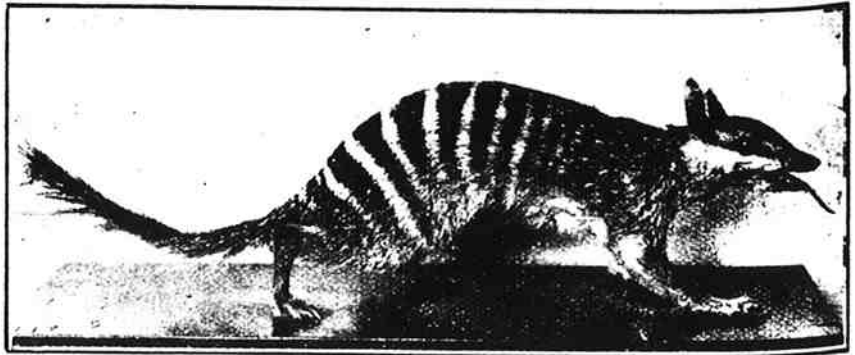
THE NUMBAT.

(By L. GLAUERT, B.A., F.G.S., Curator of Perth Museum.)

The Numbat (*Myrmecobius fasciatus*), sometimes also known as the Banded Anteater or Marsupial Anteater, is one of those marsupials in which the female at the time of carrying her young shows no traces of a pouch: for even the small lateral folds of skin which develop on the belly of the Chuditch or Spotted Native Cat, are absent. There is, however, abundant internal evidence to show that the pouchless Numbat is a true marsupial.

I have directed attention to this peculiarity because there are people who think that all marsupials should be provided with a pouch or bag as roomy and perfect as those we find upon female kangaroos or possums, but as we shall see later there are quite a number of modifications of this structure among our marsupials, some of which are beautifully adapted to the particular animal's mode of life.

Returning now to the Numbat: this animal, in my opinion, is the most beautiful of our native mammals and, what should be of greater interest to all of us, it is to-day a purely Western Australian animal. Years ago it lived in parts of South Australia also, but it died out there so rapidly that very few specimens have been preserved. In our South-West the Numbat is sure to be greatly affected by the spread of settlement and cultivation: I would, therefore, urge all of you to do your best to preserve this unique creature, which is far more truly Western Australian than is our famous Black Swan. The animal does



The Numbat.

(Block by courtesy of "The Westralian Farmers' Gazette.")

no harm to stock or crops, and is of considerable benefit to man because of the unceasing war it wages upon white ants and other pests. Do not, therefore, kill a Numbat if you can help it: if you find a dead one be sure to send it to the Museum.

The animal is about the size of a large rat, for the head and body generally measure about 9 inches in length. It is notable for its broad flat head and for the remarkable flattening of the hinder part

of the body, almost suggesting that it has had the misfortune to be run over. This condition, however, is quite normal, for I have observed it in all the specimens that have come into my hands.

The general colour above is greyish brown or reddish brown in front, becoming gradually darker on the rump where there is prominent banding. The head is grizzled owing to a touch of white, and the same grizzly appearance characterises the rest of the body. There is a white stripe above the eye, and a dark brown band stretching from the tip of the snout through the eye to the base of the ear. The cheek and upper lip are pale. The ears are rather thick and small, and are coated with short stiff hairs without and within. The hair on the trunk, as elsewhere, is short, harsh, and bristly, becoming longer on the rump and tail which is quite bushy. The outer sides of the limbs are coloured like the adjacent parts of the body, the inner sides being pale like the chin, throat and belly. Some examples are distinctly rust-coloured on the throat and chest. Strange to say this feature is not confined to animals which are more rufous on the upper surface; I fancy it is a feature of old males, for we have the same thing in possums.

The Numbat, which once had a range extending over that part of Western Australia bounded by the Darling Range and the goldfields railway is, unfortunately becoming less plentiful in this region. With the spread of settlement this interesting little animal has become exceedingly rare in many parts, preferring evidently to seek a home in the uncleared bush further afield. In recent years it has been reported from the Watheroo, Wongan Hills and Benenbbin districts, whilst the Museum has in its collection a specimen obtained at Armadale a few years ago.

Little is known about the creature's habits: as far as I know it has never been kept in captivity for any length of time, and recorded observations made in the bush are very scanty. The animal, however, is less nocturnal in its habits than many of our other native animals, for it has often been seen moving about in the bush in broad daylight. When hunting for food the Numbat moves by a succession of leaps, its tail being carried high in the air. Every now and again it rests upon its hind legs, raising its body and looking around with its beautiful dark eyes. When it comes upon an Ant's nest the Numbat breaks it open by means of its powerful claws, and the prey is gathered in with its long slender extensile tongue. When pursued the animal generally makes for a hollow log, from which it may easily be extracted because it never offers to bite or scratch when handled.

The species was first discovered by Lieutenant Dale some 90 years ago whilst exploring the then unknown course of the Avon River. When this specimen reached London it created quite a stir in scientific circles. The number of teeth (a full grown Numbat may have from 50 to 54 teeth in its jaws), the shape of the skull, and many features of the skeleton led people to think that Australia had produced another living wonder, for they saw in the Numbat a living representative of the earliest known mammals, remains of which had been found in rocks laid down in certain parts of Europe more than 100 million years ago. Opinions still differ about the true relationship of this strange crea-

ture: that it is an ancient type is generally admitted, but many of its peculiarities it is now thought may have resulted from the animal's partial adaptation to an unusual kind of food.

Many of my readers probably live in districts where the Numbat may still be found. Nothing would please me more than to receive from them notes about this remarkable creature. By such means they will help me to build up a true account of this animal's life history.

I want you all, large and small, to have a notebook in which you write down what you actually see about our wild creatures of the bush. Never forget that a true naturalist is the friend and lover of wild life. He does not kill everything he sees; he does not rob every bird's nest that appears in his course; he watches, and watches, and watches, and writes down just what he sees, ignoring what other people tell him, for that may not be true, and a naturalist has no time for anything that may not be vouched for as an actual fact.

An English clergyman, Gilbert White, who lived in a little village called Selborne, in the eighteenth century, kept such a notebook and wrote to his learned friends about what he saw and thought: and even to-day in all parts of the world naturalists look to the published extracts of his work when they seek an inspiration in Nature Study or Bird Observation.

May it be the ambition of one of my readers, living in some small outback farm, to do for Australia what Gilbert White has done for many generations of young naturalists in the British Isles.

TRAVELS IN SPAIN.

This is the first of a series of articles on "Travels in Spain" kindly made available by their author, Mr. Harold Redcliffe. The articles were written for "The Sunday Times," by courtesy of which paper they are now being adapted for use in "Our Rural Magazine."

Spain, the Land of Lots of Time.

Spain is a land of lots of time! There is no feverish rush and jamb to be the man on top. That goal is awaited in an orderly queue. There is very little unemployment, and artisans and labourers fulfil their daily work with care, if not with haste. Business men do not become slaves to their work. Speaking generally, business establishments, commercial offices, and offices of professional men close daily at one o'clock for lunch, and do not re-open until three o'clock, or even later. Among artisans and workers generally the eight hours' system prevails. The street hawker never unduly presses his wares, and the clean-looking coche de plaza is drawn by a well-cared-for