martens, stoats, otters, &c., and forms the largest family of the *Arctoidea* or bear-like division of the Land *Carni­vora* (see the article Mammalia, vol. xv. p. 439-40, where the zoological characters of these groups are given in detail).

The common skunk *(Mephitis mephitica)* is a native of North America, extending from Hudson’s Bay southwards to Guatemala in Central America. It is a beautiful little animal, about the size of a cat, though of a stouter and heavier build, with rich lustrous black fur, strikingly

varied on the back by a very variably shaped patch or streak of white. Its muzzle is long and pointed, its eyes sharp and bead-like, and its grey or white tail is long and unusually bushy.

The following account of the habits and disposition of the skunk is extracted from Dr C. Hart Merriam’s *Mam­mals of the Adirondack Region, New York,* 1884 :—

“The skunk preys upon mice, salamanders, frogs, and the eggs of birds that nest on or within reach from the ground. At times he eats carrion, and if he chances to stumble upon a hen’s nest the eggs are liable to suffer ; and once in a while he acquires the evil habit of robbing the hen-roost, but as a rule skunks are not addicted to this vice.

“ Of all our native mammals perhaps no one is so universally abused and has so many unpleasant things said about it as the innocent subject of the present biography ; and yet no other species is half so valuable to the farmer. Pre-eminently an insect- eater, he destroys more beetles, grasshoppers, and the like than all our other mammals together, and in addition to these he devours vast numbers of mice.

“He does not evince that dread of man that is so manifest in the vast majority of our mammals, and when met during any of his circumambulations rarely thinks of running away. He is slow in movement and deliberate in action and does not often hurry him­self in whatever he does. His ordinary gait is a measured walk, but when pressed for time he breaks into a low shuffling gallop. It is hard to intimidate a skunk, but when once really frightened he manages to get over the ground at a very fair pace.

“ Skunks remain active throughout the greater part of the year in this region, and hibernate only during the severest portion of the winter. They differ from most of our hibernating mammals in that the inactive period is apparently dependent solely on the temperature, while the mere amount of snow has no influence whatever upon their movements.

“ Skunks, particularly when young, make very pretty pets, being attractive in appearance, gentle in disposition, interesting in manners, and cleanly in habits—rare qualities indeed ! They are playful, sometimes mischievous, and manifest considerable affection for those who have the care of them. Their flesh is white, tender, and sweet, and is delicious eating.

“ Skunks have large families, from six to ten young being com­monly raised each season ; and as a rule they all live in the same hole until the following spring.”

We now come to the consideration of the remarkable and overpowering odour which has brought the skunk into such evil notoriety, and which is not the mere smell of the animal itself, as in the case of most other evil­smelling mammals, but arises from the much-modified secretion of the anal glands. These glands, although present in all *Mustelidæ,* are especially developed in the skunks, and are peculiar for being so entirely under the control of the animal that at ordinary times, as Dr Merriam has stated, the animal is enabled to be both cleanly and free from smell. The glands which secrete the odoriferous fluid are modifications of the ordinary anal glands possessed by nearly all *Carnivora,* but in the skunks they are enormously enlarged, entirely surround the rectum, and are provided with thick muscular gizzard-like coats. The two ducts leading from these glands open at the tips of two small conical papillæ placed just inside the anus, in such a position that by everting the anus the animal can protrude them externally, and with them can guide the direction of the jet of nauseous fluid, which is often propelled by the powerful muscles surrounding the glands to a distance of from 8 to 12 feet.

It is almost needless to state that the old stories about the skunk’s smell arising from its urine, and of its splash­ing the fluid about with its tail are both entirely without foundation. The secretion itself is a clear yellowish liquid, with a marvellously penetrating ammoniacal and nauseous smell. So powerful and penetrating is this smell that Dr Merriam says, “I have known the scent to become strikingly apparent in every part of a well-closed house, in winter, within five minutes time after a skunk had been killed at a distance of more than a hundred yards,” and under favourable conditions it may be distinctly perceived at a distance of more than a mile ; instances are also on record of persons having become entirely unconscious after inhaling the smell. On the other hand it is said to act as a potent remedy in cases of asthma and similar diseases, but to most people such a remedy would be almost worse than the disease itself.

The other species of skunk are the following :—

The Long-tailed Skunk (*Mephitis macrum),* a native of central and southern Mexico, differs from the common species by generally having two white stripes along its sides, and by its much longer and bushier tail.

The little Striped Skunk *(Mephitis putorius),* found in the southern United States, and ranging southwards to Yucatan and Guatemala, is much smaller than *M. mephitica,* and its colouring is of a very peculiar and striking nature, consisting of four interrupted longi­tudinal white stripes on a black ground, the general aspect of the animal being one of the most beautiful and striking in all this brightly marked family. Its skull also differs to such an extent from that of the common skunk that this species has been separated as a distinct genus under the name of *Spilogale,* but there is hardly sufficient reason for this.

Finally, the Conepatl *(Concρatus mapurito),* the skunk of tropical America, ranging from Texas to Chili and Patagonia, differs still more from the true skunks, although in colour it is almost pre­cisely similar to the common species, varying in the same way and to the same remarkable extent in the relative development of the black and white. Its build is heavier than in *Mephitis* ; its snout and head are more pig-like ; and its nostrils open downwards and forwards instead of laterally on the sides of the muzzle. Its skull has many special characters, and its teeth are different in shape and, as a rule, in number also, the first minute premolar of *Mephitis* being almost invariably absent, so that its dental formula is only i 3/3, c 1/1, *pm 2/3, m 1/2* = 32.

For descriptions of the anal glands see Wyman, *Pr. Bost. Soc.,* i.. p. 110, 1844 ; Warren, *Pr. Bost. Soc.,* iii. p. 175, 1851; Parker, *Ann. Nat.,* v. p. 246, 1871; Chatin, *Ann. Sci.* *Nat*., [5], xix. p. 100, 1874 ; and for general descriptive accounts see Alien, *Bull. Harvard Coll.,* i. p. 178, 1869; Coues, *Fur-bearing Animals,* pp. 187-260, 1877 ; Merriam, *ut supra.* (O. T.)

SKVIRA, a district town of European Russia, in the government of Kieff, 77 miles south-west of Kieff, and 27 miles from the Fastova railway-junction. It is merely a big village, with 14,200 inhabitants, mostly engaged in agri­culture, and has municipal institutions only as the seat of