

BUFFON'S NATURAL HISTORY

OF

The Globe, and of Man;

BEASTS, BIRDS, FISHES, REPTILES, AND INSECTS.

CORRECTED AND ENLARGED

By JOHN WRIGHT, M. Z. S.



W. Harvey, del.

J. Thompson, sc.

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weaker. A combat between a male and female commonly lasts longer than that between two males. They begin by pursuing and biting each other; then each of them retires aside, as if to take breath. After a short interval they renew the combat, and continue to fight till one of them falls.

THE BOBAC, AND OTHER MARMOTS.

THE name of the *Strasbourg Marmot* has been affixed to the hamster, and that of the *Poland Marmot* to the Bobac: but, it is certain, that the hamster is not a Marmot; and it is also probable, that the Bobac is one, as it only differs from the Marmot of the Alps, by the colour of its fur, which is not quite so gray. There is a great claw, or toe, to the fore feet of the hamster, while the Marmot has only four toes to each foot; but in other respects it perfectly resembles it. It is the same with respect to the Canadian Marmot, or Monax, which some travellers have termed the *Whistler*. It only seems to differ from the Marmot by the tail, which is thicker of hair.

The Bobac constructs burrows obliquely in the ground, of the depth of two, three, or four yards, and consisting of several galleries. Where the soil is hard or rocky, thirty or forty animals work in concert. Towards the approach of winter, they fill their burrows with the finest hay. They are good natured and timid, but when driven to defend themselves they bite severely. It is easy to tame them.

The Canadian Monax, the Poland Bobac, and the Alpine Marmots, are, indeed, probably all the same kind of animal, under different denominations. As this species prefers the coldest and highest moun-

tains in Poland, Russia, and other parts of the north of Europe, no wonder it is found in Canada, where it is only somewhat less than in Europe.

The Siberian animal also, called by the Russians *Jevras Chka*, is a kind of Marmot, still less than the Canadian Monax.

JERBOA



Is a generical name, which we make use of in this place, to denote those remarkable animals whose legs are extremely disproportionate. In many particulars, both of habit and conformation, the Jerboa bears a striking resemblance to the kangaroo tribe, though, according to the Linnæan system, it does not class with it. Like the kangaroo, it has long hind legs, which it uses in leaping. It seldom goes on all fours; and its fore legs, which are very short, are almost wholly employed in holding its food, and in making its burrows. There are four distinct species or varieties of this kind. First, the *Tarsier*, of which we have already spoken, and which is certainly a particular species, as its toes are made like those of a monkey, having five on each foot. Secondly, the *Jerboa*, whose feet are like the *fissipedes*,

are the most esteemed. The difference of this skin from others consists in the quality of the fur, which has no grain, and rubbed any way is equally smooth and unresisting; whereas, the furs of other animals, rubbed against the grain, give a sensation of roughness from their resistance. The skin of the Sable is, accordingly, more valuable than that of any other animal of an equal size.

The hunting of the Sable falls to the lot of condemned criminals, who are sent from Russia into these wild and extensive forests, which, for a great part of the year, are covered with snow: these unfortunate wretches remain there many years, and are obliged to furnish a certain number of skins every year: they only kill this animal by a single ball, in order to damage it as little as possible; and sometimes, instead of firearms, they make use of the cross-bow and very small pointed arrows. As the success of this hunting trade supposes address and great assiduity, the officers are permitted to encourage the hunters, by allowing them to share among themselves the surplus of those skins which they procure; and this, in the process of a few years, amounts to a very considerable sum. As, however, Siberia has become more populous, the Sables have retired further to the north and east, among the deserts and mountains.

THE LEMMING RAT, OR LAPLAND MARMOT,

Is of the shape of a mouse, but has a shorter tail: its body is about the length of five inches, covered with fine hair of various colours. Those of Norway are of the size of a water rat; but those of Lapland

are scarcely as large as mice. The former are variegated with black and tawny in the upper parts; the sides of the head and the under parts are white. The legs are grayish, and the under parts of the body of a dull white. In some there are many red hairs about the mouth resembling whiskers, six of which are longer and redder than the rest. The mouth is but small, and the upper lip is divided like the squirrel's. The remains of the food in the throat of this animal incline us to imagine it ruminates. The head is large, short, and thick; the neck short; and the body thick. The eyes are small and black; the ears round, and inclining towards the neck; the legs before are short, and those behind longer, which gives it a greater degree of swiftness; the feet are clothed with hair, and armed with five very sharp and crooked claws; the middle claw is very long, and the fifth is like a little finger, or the spur of a cock, sometimes placed very high up the leg. This animal, therefore, whose legs are very short, runs very swift. It generally inhabits the mountains of Norway and Lapland, but descends in such great numbers in some years, and in some seasons, that the inhabitants look on their arrival as a terrible scourge, from which there is no possibility of deliverance. They move, for the most part, in a square, marching forward by night, and lying still by day. Thus, like an animated torrent, they are often seen more than a mile broad covering the ground, and that so thick, that the hindmost touches its leader. It is in vain that the inhabitants resist, or attempt to stop their progress; they still keep moving forward; and though thousands are destroyed, myriads are seen to succeed and make their destruction impracticable: they generally move in lines, which

are about three feet from each other, and exactly parallel: their march is always directed from the north-west to the south-west, and regularly conducted from the beginning. Wherever their motions are turned, nothing can stop them; they go directly forward, impelled by some strange power; and from the time they at first set out, they never think of retreating. If a lake or a river happens to interrupt their progress, they all together take the water and swim over it; a fire, a deep well, or a torrent, does not turn them out of their straight-lined direction; they boldly plunge into the flames, or leap down the well, and are sometimes seen climbing up on the other side. If they are interrupted by a boat across the river while they are swimming, they never attempt to swim round it, but mount directly up its sides; and the boatmen, who know how vain resistance would be, calmly suffer the living torrent to pass over, which it does without farther damage. If they meet with a stack of hay or corn which interrupts their passage, instead of going over it, they gnaw their way through; if they are stopped by a house in their course, if they cannot get through it, they continue there till they die. It is happy, however, that they eat nothing that is prepared for human subsistence; they never enter a house to destroy the provisions, but are contented with eating every root and vegetable that they meet. If they happen to pass through a meadow, they destroy it in a very short time, and give it an appearance of being burnt up and strewed with ashes. If they are interrupted in their course, and a man should imprudently venture to attack one of them, the little animal is no way intimidated by the disparity of strength, but furiously flies up at its oppo-

nent, and barking somewhat like a puppy, wherever it fastens it does not easily quit its hold: if, at last, the leader is found out of its line, which it defends as long as it can, and be separated from the rest of its kind, it sets up a plaintive cry, different from that of anger, and, as some say, gives itself a voluntary death, by hanging itself on the fork of a tree.

An enemy so numerous and destructive would quickly render the countries where they appear utterly uninhabitable, did it not fortunately happen that the same rapacity that animates them to destroy the labours of mankind, at last impels them to destroy each other. After committing incredible devastation, they are at last seen to separate into two armies, opposed with deadly hatred along the coasts of the larger lakes and rivers. The Laplanders, who observe them thus drawn up to fight, instead of considering their mutual animosity as a happy riddance of a most dreadful pest, form ominous prognostics from the manner of their engagements: they consider their combats as a presage of war, and expect an invasion from the Russians or Swedes, as the side next those kingdoms happens to conquer. The two divisions, however, continue their engagements and animosity until one part overcomes the other: from that time they utterly disappear, nor is it well known what becomes of either the conquerors or the conquered. Some suppose, that they rush headlong into the sea; others, that they kill themselves, as some are found hanging on the forked branches of a tree; and others, that they are destroyed by the young spring herbage. But the most probable opinion is, that having devoured the vegetable productions of the country, and having nothing more to subsist on, they then

fall to devouring each other, and having habituated themselves to that kind of food, continue it. However this be, they are often found dead by thousands, and their carcasses have been known to infect the air for several miles round, so as to produce very malignant disorders: they seem also to infect the plants they have gnawed, for the cattle often die that afterwards feed in the places where they passed. The inhabitants have an opinion, as they do not know whence such numbers proceed, that they fall with the rain.

Five or six young ones are produced at each litter, and the female brings forth several times in the course of a year. They sometimes litter while emigrating, and they have been seen carrying some of their offspring in their mouths, and others on their backs.

As for the rest, the male is generally larger and more beautifully spotted than the female: they go in droves into the water; but no sooner does a storm of wind arise, than they are all drowned. The flesh of the Lemmings is horrid food, and their skin, although covered with a very beautiful fur, is of too little consistence to be serviceable.

THE CANADIAN OTTER,

WHICH is much larger than the common Otter, must be a native of the north of Europe, as well as of Canada. It appears to be larger and blacker than the common Otter; but is rather a variety than a distinct species.