

The SURIKATE, or FOUR-  
TOED WEASEL\*.

THIS animal was purchased in Holland, under the name of *Surikate*. It is a native of Surinam, and other provinces of South America †. We fed it for some time; and afterwards M. de Seve, who has drawn, with equal skill and attention, the animals published in this work, having kept it alive during several months, communicated to me the remarks he had made with regard to its natural habits and dispositions. It is a handsome, active, and dextrous animal, sometimes walking on end, and frequently sit-

\* The four-toed weasel, with the upper jaw much longer than the lower, and very moveable and pliant. The ears are rounded, the hair pretty long, hard, and upright, varied with black and white; the points black. It has only four toes on each foot, which is an exception to the weasel kind. The tail is taper. The length of the animal, from nose to tail, is about one foot, and that of the tail six inches; Pennant's *Synops. of Quad.* p. 223.

† Mr. Pennant remarks, that M. de Buffon is the only person who has described this animal, but that he seems to have been deceived with regard to the place of its nativity. Instead of South America, Mr. Pennant says, that it inhabits the Cape of Good Hope and the island of Java, and refers, for his authorities, to *Pallas, Mysel. Zool.* p. 59, 60, and *Rumph. Herb. Ambon. aff.* p. 71. The latter, when speaking of the ichneumon, or wasco, says, 'ac distinguendus est a suracate seu *Javanorum* zape, quod est muscica.'

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ting upright, with his fore-feet hanging down, his head erect, and moving on the neck as upon a pivot. He always assumed this attitude when he came near the fire to warm himself. He is not so large as a rabbit, and pretty much resembles the ichneumon, both in size and hair, only it is rougher, and the tail is not so long. But, by the prominence of the upper part of the muzzle, he makes a nearer approach to the coat, or Brazilian Weasel, than to any other animal. He has also a character which is peculiar to him and the hyæna; for they are the only animals which have four toes on all their feet.

At first, we fed this surikate with milk, because he was very young: But his taste for flesh soon appeared. He eat raw meat, and particularly the flesh of chickens, with great avidity. He likewise endeavoured to seize young animals. A young rabbit, which lived in the same house, would have fallen a prey to him, if he had not been prevented from making the attack. He was fond of fish, and still fonder of eggs. I have seen him carry off, with his two paws, eggs which had been put into the water to be boiled. He refused fruits, and even bread, unless it was mashed. Like the squirrel, he employed his fore paws to convey his victuals to his mouth. In drinking, he lapped like a dog, and never drank water but when it was warm. His ordinary drink was his own urine,

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though it had a very strong odour. He frolicked with the cats, and always innocently. He did no harm to the children, and never bit any person but the master of the house, to whom he had taken an aversion. He never gnawed with his teeth, but often injured the plaster and furniture by scratching with his claws. He was so well tamed, that he knew his own name. He went about through the whole house, and returned whenever he was called. He uttered two kinds of sounds. When he was tired by being alone, or heard any unusual noise, he barked like a young dog; and, when he was caressed, or felt any pleasant emotion, he made a noise as brisk and striking as a small rattle rapidly turned round. This animal was a female, and appeared to be frequently in season, notwithstanding the coldness of the climate, which, though every thing was done to cherish and keep her warm, she could support during one winter only.

### S U P P L E M E N T.

WE formerly remarked, that the surikate did no injury to children; and that it never bit any person but adults, and, among others, the master of the family, against whom it had taken an aversion. I since heard that it never attacked

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either the mother or the children of his family, but that it bit a number of other persons of both sexes. M. de Sève remarked, that it was induced to bite by some particular odour. When laid hold of, the cartilage at the end of its nose curled up while it smelled, and, according to the odour received, it either bit or did not bite. This experiment was tried upon a number of people; and, it is singular, whenever it bit one person, it always continued to bite him. Some people were so disagreeable to him, that he endeavoured to make his escape in order to bite them; and, when he could not lay hold of the legs, he darted upon their shoes or petticoats. He even used several artifices to come near those whom he wished to bite.

M. Vosmaër, in his description of a flying squirrel, makes the following pertinent remarks.

‘ M. de Buffon,’ says M. Vosmaër, ‘ has probably been deceived both with regard to the name and the native country of the surikate, which was last summer transmitted by M. Tullagh to the Prince of Orange. It belongs not to America, but to Africa. This small animal, a male and a female of which were directed to me, but the female died in the passage, was unknown to Kolbe, or at least is not mentioned by him, and appears to be found far up the country only: This inference may be drawn from the governour’s letter, which I received at the same time, and where he makes the following

‘lowing remark: *I send by the Captain two small animals, a male and a female, to which I can neither give a name, nor refer them to any other species; because they were, for the first time, brought from the remote deserts and stony mountains of this vast country. They are very mild and gentle. They feed upon fresh meat, either boiled or raw, eggs, and ants. I hope they will arrive in life; for, I imagine, they were never hitherto seen in Europe.*

The evidence of M. Tulbagh is positive, and M. de Vosmaër’s remark is just; for, though I had this animal alive for a long time, I received its name and country from no better authority than an animal merchant, who told me he had purchased it in Holland under the name of *surikate*, and that it came from Surinam. We are now certain that it is neither found in Surinam nor in the other provinces of South America, but in the mountains of Africa above the Cape of Good Hope; and, as to the name, it is of little moment: It can be changed when we receive better information.

Plate CCXVIII.



SURIKATE.