

The PEKAN* and the VISON.

THE name *pekan* was long familiar in the fur-trade of Canada †, without knowing the animal to which it properly belonged. This name is not to be found in the writings of the naturalists, and travellers have employed it indiscriminately to denote different animals ‡, and particularly the mouffettes. By others, the animal which ought to bear the name of pekan has been called a *fox* or a *wild cat*; and it was impossible to derive any precise knowledge from such short and erroneous intimations. With regard to the *vison*, we are equally ignorant. We know nothing of these names, except that they belong to two North American animals. We

* Pekan weasel, with very long and strong whiskers; ears a little pointed; hair on the head, body, belly, and legs, cinereous at the roots, and of a bright bay at the ends, very soft and glossy. Between the fore-legs, there is a white spot. The toes are covered with thick hair above and below. The claws are sharp. The tail is of a deeper colour than the body. In form, it is like a martin, but much less; Pennant's *Synopsis of Quad.* p. 224.

† Names of the skins brought from Canada, and their values in the year 1683. — Those of the pekan, wild cat, or devil's children, are worth one livre fifteen sous a piece; *Voyage de la Houssas*, tom. ii. p. 39.

‡ It diffuses an insupportable odour. In Canada, the French call it *devil's child* or *sinking beast*: Some of them, however, give it the name of *pekan*; *Kalm's Trav.* p. 412.

found these two animals in the cabinet of M. Aubry, who obligingly permitted us to describe and draw them.

The pekan has so strong a resemblance to the pine weasel, and the vison* to the martin, that they may be regarded as varieties of these species. They not only have the same figure, the same proportions, the same length of tail, the same quality of hair, but the same number of teeth and claws, and the same instinct and manners. Hence we may conclude, that the pekan is a variety of the pine weasel, and the vison a variety of the martin, or, at least, that the species are so allied, that they exhibit no real differences. The hair of the pekan and vison is only browner, and more lustrous and silky than that of the pine weasel and the martin. But this difference, it is well known, is common to them with the beaver, the otter, and other animals of North America, whose furs are more beautiful than those of the same animals in the North of Europe.

* I am inclined to think, that the animal mentioned by Sagard Theodat, under the name of *otasy*, is the same with the vison. 'The otasy,' he remarks, 'is as large as a small rabbit. Its hair is very black, and so soft, polished, and fine, that it resembles velvet.' The Canadians are fond of these skins, and make garments of them; *Poyage au Pays des Hurons*, p. 308. No Canadian animal corresponds so well with this description as the vison.

THE SABLE*.

THE sable is mentioned by almost every naturalist, without knowing more of it than the skin. M. Gmelin is the first who gave a figure and description of this animal. He saw two of them alive in the house of the governor of Tobolski. 'The sable,' says he, 'resembles the martin in the form and habit of body, and the weasel in the teeth. It has six

* Sable weasel, with long whiskers, rounded ears, and long bushy tail. The colour of the hair is black at the tips, and cinereous at the bottom; the chin is cinereous, and the edges of the ears yellowish. Sometimes the hair is of a tawny cast; for, in spring, after shedding the coat, the colour varies. There are instances of their being found of a snowy whiteness. The usual length, from nose to tail, is about eighteen inches, and that of the tail ten; *Pennant's Syntax, of Quad.* p. 217.

Zobel, in German; *Sobol*, in Polish; *Sabbel*, in Swedish; *Zibelline*, *Marte Zibelline*, in French.

Zobela; *Agricoll. An. falter.* p. 485.

Musella Sobella; *Gejner, Quad.* p. 768.

Musella Zibellina, the sable; *Raii Syn. Quad.* p. 201. *Klein, Quad.* p. 64.

Musella Zibellina, *Aristotelis Satherius, Nipho, Cebalus, Alciatis, Mas Sarmaticus et Scythicus; Charlevoix Exercit.* p. 20.

Musella Zibellina, pedibus fatis, corpore obscure fulvo, fronte exalbida, gutture cinereo; *Lin. Syst. Nat.* p. 68.

Musella Zibellina; *Nov. Com. Petrop. tom. v. p. 330. tab. 6.*

Martes Zibellina; *Musella obscure fulva, gutture cinereo; Brisson, Quad.* p. 180. *Animalium quorundam Quadrig. Descript. Auctore Georg. Gmelin.*