

THE POLECAT*.

THE polecat has a great resemblance to the martin in temperament, disposition, manners, and figure. Like the latter, he approaches our habitations, mounts on the roofs, takes up his abode in hay-lofts, barns, and unfrequented places, from which he issues during the night only in quest of prey. He steals slyly into the court-yards, voleries, and pigeon-houses, where, with less noise than the martin, he makes greater havoc, cutting off the heads of all the fowls, and then transporting them one by one to his magazine. If, as frequently happens, he cannot carry them off entire, on account of the smallness of the entry to his hole, he eats the

* The polecat has the space round the mouth, and the tips of the ears white; the head, body, and legs, of a chocolate colour, almost black; on the sides, the hairs are of a tawny cast, and the tail is black; the length of the body is 17 inches, and of the tail 6.

In Latin, *Futorius*; in Italian, *Fatta, Puzze*; in German, *Ihu, Ull, Bausing*; in Polish, *Fydra, Tibern*; in French, *Le Putois*.

Futorius; *Gesner. Hist. Quad.* p. 767. *Icon. Quad.* p. 99. *Rai Synopf. Quad.* p. 199.

Mustela putorius, pedibus fuscis, corpore flavo nigricante; ore auriculisque albis; *Lin. Syst.* p. 67.

Mustela pilla in exorta ex cinereo albidis, colore nigricante terminatis, vestita, eris circumferentia alba; *Briffon. Regn. Anim.* p. 249;

• brains,

Plate LXXVI.



YELLOW BREASTED WEASEL

brains, and takes only their heads along with him. He is likewise very fond of honey, attacks the hives in winter, and forces the bees to abandon them. He never retires far from the abodes of men. The spring is their season of love: The males fight for the female on the roofs of houses. They afterwards leave her, and go to pass the summer in the fields or in the woods. The female, on the contrary, continues in her habitation till she brings forth, and does not lead off her young till toward the end of summer. She litters three or four, and sometimes five, suckles them but a short time, and accustoms them early to eat blood and eggs.

In the villages, they live upon poultry; and, in the country, they hunt for prey. During the summer, they take up their abode in rabbit-holes, in the cliffs of rocks, or in the hollow trunks of trees, from which they issue out in the night, and roam about the fields and woods, searching for the nests of partridges, larks, and quails. They climb trees in quest of the nests of other birds. They lie in watch for rats, field-mice, and moles; and carry on a perpetual war against the rabbit, who cannot escape them, as they enter with ease into his hole. A single family of polecats is sufficient to destroy a whole warren. This would be a simple method of diminishing the number of rabbits in places where they are too abundant.

The

The polecat is somewhat less than the martin: His tail is also shorter, his muzzle sharper, and his hair blacker and more bushy: He has white hair on his front, and likewise on the sides of the nose and round the mouth. He differs still more from the martin in his voice; the martin has a sharp piercing cry; the cry of the polecat is more blunt. Each of them, as well as the pine-weasel and squirrel, have a deep grunting tone, which they repeat often when irritated. Lastly, the odour of the martin is very different from that of the polecat, which, instead of being agreeable, is extremely fetid; and, from this circumstance, the animal obtained its Latin name *putorius*. He sends forth this insupportable odour to a great distance, especially when irritated. The dogs will not eat the flesh of the polecat; and even his skin, though good, is in no estimation, because it never loses entirely its natural smell. This odour proceeds from two vesicles near the anus, from which an unctuous matter continually exudes; and the effluvia of it is extremely offensive in the polecat, ferret, weasel, badger, &c.; but it constitutes, on the contrary, a species of perfume, in the civet-cat, pine-weasel, martin, &c.

The polecat seems to be confined to the temperate climates: Few or none of them are found in the northern regions; and, in warm countries, they are still more rare than the pine-weasel.

The

Plate LXXVII.



POLE CAT.

A. Hall sculp.

The meles Surinamensis, or stifling weasel, is an animal of a different species; and the polecat appears to be bounded, in Europe, from Italy to Poland. This animal, it is certain, avoids the cold; for, in winter, he retires into the houses, and his steps are never seen in the snow, either in the woods or in fields which are distant from the habitations of men: He, perhaps, is equally averse to great heat; for he is never found in warm climates.