

THE WATER-RAT*.

THIS animal is about the size of a rat; but, from its manners and dispositions, has a much greater resemblance to the otter than to the common rat. Like the otter, it frequents the fresh water, and is found in the margins of rivers, brooks, and pools, and lives mostly on fishes. Gudgeons, minnows, blays, and the fry of carps, pikes, and barbels, are his ordinary food.

* Rat with a thick blunt nose; ears hid in the fur; eyes small; teeth yellow: On each foot five toes; inner toe of the fore foot very small; the first joint very flexible: Head and body covered with long hairs, black mixed with a few ferruginous hairs; belly of an iron gray; tail covered with short black hairs, the tip whitish: Weight nine ounces; length, from nose to tail, 7 inches; tail only 5; Pennant's *Synops. of Quad.* p. 301.

In Latin, *Mus aquaticus*; in Italian, *Serge maggiore*; in German, *Wasser-maus*; in Polish, *Mysz wodna*; in French, *Le Rat d'eau*.

Mus aquaticus; Gessner. *Hist. Quad.* p. 732.

Mus aquaticus, quadrupes Bellem; Leon. p. 354.

Mus aquaticus major, five *rattus aquaticus*; Ray, *Synops. Quad.* p. 317.

Mus amphibius, cauda elongata pilosa, plantis palmatis; Linn. *Syst. Nat.* p. 82.

Mus rattus aquaticus; Klein. *Quad.* p. 57.

Mus cauda longa, pilis, supra ex nigro et flavescente mixtis, infra cinereis vestitus. *Mus aquaticus*; Brisson. *Regn. Anim.* p. 175.

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He likewise eats frogs, water insects, and sometimes the roots of plants. He has not, like the otter, membranes between his toes. This error has been copied from Willoughby by Ray and other naturalists. Though all his toes be separate, he swims with ease, keeps long under the water, and carries off his prey to be devoured upon the grass, or in his hole. He is sometimes surprised by fishers when searching for craw-fish; and he endeavours to escape by biting their fingers, or leaping into the water. His head is shorter, his muzzle thicker, his hair more bushy, and his tail much shorter, than those of the rat. Like the otter, he avoids large rivers, or rather those which are much frequented. He never visits houses or barns, but keeps upon the margins of waters, from which he wanders not upon dry land so far as the otter, which is sometimes found at the distance of a league from water. Water-rats are seldom met with in elevated places, or in dry plains, but are extremely numerous in moist and marshy valleys. The females come in season about the end of winter, and bring forth in the month of April, the litter generally consisting of six or seven. Perhaps they bring forth more than once a year; but of this we have no proper knowledge. Their flesh is not intolerably bad, being eaten by the peasants, as well as that of the otter, during the season of Lent. They are found every where over

Europe, except in the polar regions. If we may credit Bellon, they inhabit the banks of the Nile: However, the figure he gives of them has so little resemblance to our water-rat, that it is probable the Nile rats form a different species of animals.



Plate LXXXIV.



Plate LXXXV.

