

THE RACCOON*.

SEVERAL authors have described this animal under the name of *Coati*. But, to prevent its being confounded with the true *Coati*, or even with the *Coati-mundi*, we have adopted its English name.

The raccoon which we have had alive, and kept him twelve months, was of the size and figure of a small badger. His body is thick and short, and the hair long, bushy, black at the points, and gray underneath. His head resembles that of the fox; but his ears are round and much shorter. The eyes are large, and of a yellowish green colour. Above the eyes, a black band runs

* This animal has a black sharp pointed nose; upper jaw longer; ears short, and rounded; eyes surrounded with two broad patches of black; from the forehead to the nose, a dusky line; face, cheeks, and chin, white; upper part of the body covered with hair, ash-coloured at the root, whitish in the middle, and tipped with black; tail very bushy, annulated with black; soles black, and quite divided; *Pennant's Synops. of Quad.* p. 199.

Volpi affinis Americana, Rattoon seu Raccoon; Ray, Quad. p. 179.

Vulpes Americana, Mapach dicta, Anglice Rattoon; Charlet. p. 15.

Raccoon; *Shaw, Hist. of Jamaica, tom. ii. p. 329.*

Ursus lotor, cauda annulata, fascia per oculos transversali nigra; Linn. Syst. Nat. p. 70.

Coati Brasiliensium; Klein. Quad. p. 72.

Ursus cauda annulata variegata; Brisson. Regn. Animal. p. 261.

across;

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across; the muzzle is slender, the nose somewhat turned up, and the upper lip advances beyond the under one. He has, like the dog, six cutting teeth, and two canine in each jaw. The tail is bushy, as long as the body, and marked alternately with black and white rings through its whole extent. The fore-legs are much shorter than the hind ones; and there are five toes, armed with strong sharp claws, on each foot. The hind feet rest so much on the heel, that the animal can elevate and support his body in a position inclined forwards. He uses the fore-feet in carrying food to his mouth. But, as his toes are rigid, and have little flexibility, he uses both hands at a time in laying hold of what is given him. Though thick and short, he is very agile: His claws, which are sharp as thorns, enable him to climb trees with great facility. He mounts the trunk with alacrity, and runs to the extremities of the branches. He goes by leaps, rather gambols than walks, and his movements, though oblique, are quick and light.

This animal is a native of the southern parts of America. He is never found in the Ancient Continent; at least, those travellers who have described the animals of Africa and the East Indies make no mention of him. But he is very common in the warm regions of America, and particularly in Jamaica*, where he lives in the mountains, from which he descends to eat the sugar

* Sloan's Nat. Hist. of Jamaica, tom. ii. p. 329.

cane.

canes. He appears not in Canada, nor in the northern parts of the Continent; and yet he can support excessive cold. M. Klein* kept one at Dantzick; and the one in my possession has passed a whole night with his feet frozen in ice, without suffering any injury.

The raccoon softens, or rather dilutes, in water every thing he intends to eat. He throws his bread into the basin that holds his water; and, unless pressed with hunger, he does not remove it till it be well soaked. But, when very hungry, he eats dry food, or any thing that is presented to him. He searches about, and eats every thing that he can find, as flesh, either crude or prepared, fishes, eggs, living fowls, grain, roots, &c. He likewise devours all kinds of insects. He delights in hunting spiders; and, when at liberty in the garden, he eats grasshoppers, snails, and worms. He loves sugar, milk, and other soft kinds of nourishment, except fruits; but all these he rejects, when he can have flesh or fish. He retires to a distance to obey the calls of nature. He is familiar, and even caressing; for he leaps upon those he is fond of, playing spontaneously, and perpetually moving about with great agility. He appears to have much of the nature of the maki, and to possess some of the qualities of the dog.

* Klein, Quad. p. 62.

Plate CVL



RACCOON.

SUPPLEMENT.

CONCERNING the raccoon, I have received the following communication from M. Blanquart des Salines, in a letter dated Calais, October 29, 1775.

" My raccoon, before he came into my possession, had always been chained. In this state of captivity, he was very gentle, but had little inclination to caress. The people of the house were all equally kind to him; but he received them differently; for what pleased him in one, he revolted against in another; and in this his conduct was invariable.

" His chain sometimes broke; and liberty rendered him insolent. He took possession of an apartment, would allow none to enter, and it was with some difficulty that he could again be reconciled to bondage. Since he came under my management, I have frequently given him his liberty. Without losing sight of him, I allowed him to walk about with his chain; and each time his gratitude was expressed by a thousand caressing gambols. But this is by no means the case when he makes his escape himself. He then roams about, sometimes for three or four days together, upon the roofs of the neighbouring houses, descends, during the night-time, into the court-yards, enters the hen-houses,

strangles all the poultry, and eats their heads. His chain does not render him more humane, but only more circumspect. He then employs every artifice to make the fowls grow familiar with him; he permits them to partake of his victuals; and it is only after having inspired them with the highest notions of security, that he seizes one, and tears it in pieces. Some young cats have met with the same fate. The motions of this animal, though light, are always oblique; and I doubt if he can overtake other animals by running. He opens oysters with wonderful dexterity. His sense of touching must be exquisite. In all his little operations, he seldom uses either his nose or his eye. For example, he makes an oyster pass under his hind-paws; then, without looking at it, he searches with his hands for the weakest part; there he sinks his claws, separates the shells, and leaves not a vestige of the fish. In all this operation, neither his eyes nor his nose, which he keeps at a distance, are of the least use to him.

"This raccoon is not very grateful for the caresses he receives; but is extremely sensible of bad treatment. A servant one day gave him several lashes with a whip. But this man has ever since endeavoured in vain to accomplish a reconciliation. Neither eggs nor fishes, of which the animal is exceedingly fond, can appease his resentment. At the approach of the servant, the raccoon flies into a rage; his eyes kindle; he springs

springs at the man, utters most dolorous cries, and rejects every thing presented to him, till the disagreeable object disappears. The accents of his rage are very singular, sometimes resembling the whistling noise of the curlew, and sometimes the hoarse barking of an old dog.

"If any person strikes him, or if he is attacked by an animal that he thinks stronger than himself, he makes no resistance; but, like the hedge-hog, conceals his head and feet by rolling up his body in the form of a ball; no complaint escapes him; and, in this position, he calmly submits to be killed.

"I remarked, that he never allowed hay or straw to remain in his nest; but chose rather to lie upon wood. When litter is put in, he instantly throws it out. I never perceived that cold made him uneasy. Of three winters, he has passed two exposed to all the rigours of the air. I have seen him covered with snow, having no shelter, and yet in good health. I imagine that he is not solicitous about heat. During the last frosts, I presented to him warm water, and water almost frozen, for diluting his food; but he uniformly preferred the latter. He had liberty of sleeping in the stable; but he often preferred a corner of the court.

"The defect of saliva, or having but a small quantity of it, is, I imagine, the reason why this animal dilutes his food with water. He never wets fresh or bloody meat, nor a peach, nor a raisin.