

## THE BROWN RAT\*.

**T**O this species of rat, which has been known for a few years past only, I have given the appellation of *Surmulet*. This animal is mentioned by no naturalist, except M. Brisson, who calls it the *wood-rat*. It is larger and more mischievous than the common rat. It has reddish hair, a very long naked tail, and the spine of the back arched like that of the squirrel. Its body is likewise thicker; and it has whiskers like a cat. It is not above nine or ten years since this species was diffused through the environs of Paris. From whence these animals come, is uncertain; but they have multiplied prodigiously. Neither is this wonderful, when we consider that they generally produce from 12 to 15 young at a litter, and sometimes even 19. They were first discovered at Chantilly, Marly-la Ville, and Versailles, where they committed great ra-

\* Rat with the head, back, and sides, of a light brown colour, mixed with tawny and ash-colour; breast and belly dirty white; feet naked, and of a dirty flesh-colour; fore-feet furnished with four toes, and a claw instead of the fifth; length from nose to tail nine inches; tail the same; weight eleven ounces; is stronger made than the common or black rat; *Fennant's Synops. of Quad. p. 300.*

Le Rat des bois. Mus cauda longissima, supra dilute fulvus, infra albicans. Mus sylvestris. *Brisson. Regn. Anim. p. 170.*

Le Surmulet; *Buffon.*

vages.

vages. M. le Roy favoured me with great numbers of them, both living and dead, and communicated to me the remarks he had made upon this new species. The males are larger, stronger, and more mischievous than the females. When hard pursued, or when we attempt to seize them, they face about, and bite the stick or the hand that strikes them. Their bite is not only cruel, but dangerous; for it is instantly followed by a considerable swelling, and the wound, though small, does not soon heal. The females bring forth three times a year: Hence two individuals of this species may produce at least 36 young in 12 months. The mothers prepare a bed for their offspring. Some of the females sent us, which we kept in cages, were with young; and, two or three days before they brought forth, we observed that they gnawed the wood of the cages, and made of the cuttings, which were in considerable quantities, a convenient bed for their little ones.

The brown rats have some qualities which make them approach to the nature of the water-rat. Though every where diffused, they seem to prefer the banks of waters. The dogs pursue them with the same remarkable fury as they chase the water-rat. When pursued, and they find it equally easy to take to the water, or to conceal themselves in brush-wood, they choose the water, enter it without fear, and swim with great dexterity and ease. This phenomenon is chiefly exhibited when they cannot regain their holes; for,

like the long-tailed field-mouse, they dig subterraneous retreats, or rather they nestle in those made by the rabbits. The brown rats may be taken in their holes by ferrets, which pursue them with equal ardour as they do the rabbit.

These animals pass the summer in the country: And, though they feed principally upon fruits and grain, they eat young hares, partridges, and fowls. When they enter a hen-house, like the pole-cat, they kill more than they can eat. Towards the month of November, the mother and all the young quit the fields, and come in troops into the barns, where they do infinite mischief, by mincing the straw, consuming the grain, and infecting every thing with their ordure. The old males remain in the fields, each inhabiting his own hole, where, like the field-mice, they amass acorns, beech-mast, &c. filling the holes to the top, and remaining themselves at the bottom. They sleep not, like the dormouse; but go out in winter, especially when the weather is mild. Those who take up their abode in barns, banish all the mice and rats. It has even been remarked, that, since the multiplication of the brown rat about Paris, the common rats are much less frequent.

Plate XCIX.



BROWN RAT.