

## THE ERMINE\*.

THE weasel with a black tail, is called the *ermine*, and *rofelet* by the French; the *ermine* when it is white, and the *rofelet* when it is red or yellowish. Though less frequent than the ordinary weasel, they are still found in considerable numbers, especially in the ancient forests, and sometimes, during winter, in fields bordering upon woods. It is easy, at all seasons, to distinguish them from the common weasel;

\* The upper part of the body is of a pale tawny brown colour; the edges of the ears and ends of the toes, of a yellowish white; the throat, breast, and belly white; the end of the tail black: The length of the body is ten inches, and of the tail five and a half. In the north of Europe, this animal becomes entirely white at the approach of winter, except the end of the tail; and it resumes its brown colour in the spring; Pennant's *Synops. of Quad.* p. 212.

In Latin, *Hermilina*, animal *Ermineum*; in Italian, *Armelina*; in German, *Hermelin*; in Swedish, *Hermelin*, *Lekars*; in Polish, *Granglay*; in French, *L'Hermine*, or *Le Rozelet*; in English, *Ermine*, *Seas*.

*Mustela alba*; *Gisfer*, *Quad.* p. 753.

*Mustela candida*, live animal *ermineum recentiorum*; *Reg.* *Synops. Quad.* p. 198.

*Mustela erminea*, plantis fide, caudæ apice nigro; *Linn. Syst. Nat.* p. 68.

*Mustela armellina*; *mustela alba*, extrema cauda nigri; *Klein. Quad.* p. 63.

*Mustela hieme alba*, æstate supra rutila, infra alba, caudæ apice nigro; *Driffus. Reg. Animal.* p. 243.

for

for the end of their tail is always of a deep black, and the borders of the ears and toes are white.

We have little to add to what we formerly remarked concerning this animal\*. We shall only observe that it changes its colour, as usual, in winter. I had one sent me, in the beginning of March 1757, which was then white. I kept it till April 1758, when it would probably have become white, had it been at liberty; but it was confined in an iron cage, against the bars of which it perpetually rubbed, and, as it had not been sufficiently exposed to the cold, it still preserved its summer coat. It remains as savage as ever, and has lost nothing of its bad smell. In every other circumstance, it is a healthy vivacious animal, has lively eyes, a fine countenance, and movements so rapid, that it is impossible to follow them with the eye. It has always been fed with eggs and flesh; but it touches not meat till it has become putrid. It never inclined to eat honey; and, being deprived of victuals for three days, it died, after having taken a small quantity of honey. The skin of this animal is very precious. The furs of the ermine are finer and fairer than those of the white rabbit; but they soon turn yellowish; and, indeed, the ermines of our climate have always a slight tincture of yellow.

This animal is very frequent in the north, especially in Russia, Norway, and Lapland †, where,

\* See above, article Weasel.

† Œuvres de Regnard, tom. i. p. 178.

as in every other place, they are reddish in summer and white in winter. They feed upon small animals, and particularly a species of rat, which abounds in Norway and Lapland, to be afterwards mentioned. The ermines are rare in temperate climates, and are never found in warm countries. The Cape animal, called the *ermine* by Kolbe \*, and whose flesh, he remarks, is wholesome and agreeable to the palate, has no affinity to the ermine. The weasels of Cayenne, described by M. Barrere †, and the gray ermines of Tartary, and of the northern parts of China, mentioned by some travellers ‡, are also animals different from our weasels and ermines.

### S U P P L E M E N T.

IN the natural history of Norway by Pontopidan, we have the following remarks:

‘ In Norway, the ermine lives among the fragments of rocks. This animal seems to belong to the weasel tribe. His skin is white, except the tail, which is spotted with black. The furs of Norway and Lapland preserve their whiteness better than those of Russia, which sooner turn yellowish; and, for this reason, the former are of greater request, even at Petersburg. The ermine catches mice like the cat, and,

\* Descript. de Cap de Bonne-Espérance, p. 54.

† Descript. de la France Equinoxiale.

‡ Hist. Gen. des Voyages, tom. vi. p. 565-603.

Plate LXXX.



WEASEL.



ERMINE.

Plate LXXXI.



GRISON.

' when practicable, carries off his prey. He is  
 ' particularly fond of eggs, and, when the sea is  
 ' calm, he swims over to the islands which lie near  
 ' the coast of Norway, where there are vast  
 ' quantities of sea fowls. It is alledged, that,  
 ' when the female brings forth on an island, she  
 ' conducts her young to the continent, upon a  
 ' piece of wood, piloting them with her snout.  
 ' This animal, though small, kills those of a  
 ' much larger size, as the rein-deer and bear.  
 ' He jumps into one of their ears when they  
 ' are asleep, and adheres so fast by his teeth,  
 ' that the creatures cannot disengage him. He  
 ' likewise surprises eagles and heath-cocks, by  
 ' fixing on them, and never quitting them, even  
 ' when they mount in the air, till the loss of  
 ' blood makes them fall down.'