

The GRAY SQUIRREL*.

THIS animal inhabits the northern regions of both worlds. It has a great resemblance to the squirrel, from which it differs only by the following external characters: It is larger than the squirrel, and its hair is not reddish, but of a gray colour, more or less deep. The ears are deprived of the long hairs, which adorn those of the common squirrel. These differences, which are constant, seem sufficient to constitute a distinct species. Several authors maintain, that the gray squirrels of Europe differ from those of America; that the former belong to the common kind, whose colour changes with the season in our northern climates. Without pretending to deny this last fact, which,

* The ears of the gray squirrel are plain; the hair is of a dull gray colour, mixed with black, and often tinged with a dirty yellow. The belly and insides of the legs are white. The tail is long, bushy, gray, and striped with black. It is about the size of a half-grown rabbit; *Pennant's Synops. of Quad.* p. 282.

Petit gris; *Buffon*.

Gray squirrel; *Jessup's Voy. Catag.* Carolina, vol. ii. p. 74. *Smith's Voy.* p. 27. *Kalm's Voy.* p. 95. 110.

Fox squirrel; *Larsson's Corvina*, p. 124.

Sciurus cinereus Virginianus major; *Rat Synops. Quad.* p. 215. *Sciurus cinereus*; *Lyon. Syst. Nat.* p. 86.

Sciurus cinereus, auriculis ex albo flavicantibus. *Sciurus Virginianus.* *L'Ecuireuil de Virginie*; *Briffon. Rogn. Anim.* p. 107.

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however,

however, is not properly ascertained, we consider the gray squirrel of Europe and that of America as the same animal, and as a species distinct from the common squirrel; for our squirrels are found in North America as well as in the north of Europe. They are of the same size, and their colour is of a more or less lively red, according to the temperature of the climate. At the same time, we find, in both Continents, other squirrels, which are larger, and whose hair is gray or blackish in all seasons. Besides, the fur of the gray squirrel is much finer and softer than that of the common kind. Hence it appears, that these two animals, the differences between which are constant, and their species, though very similar, have never intermixed, ought to be regarded as separate species. M. Regnard * affirms positively,

* These gray squirrels are the same with the French squirrels, only their reddish colour changes to gray during the winter snows. The farther north, they turn always more gray. The Laplanders make war against them in the winter; and their dogs are so well trained to this species of hunting, that they never failed to discover the squirrels upon the highest trees, and to advertise the hunters who accompanied us. We shot some of them with our guns; for the Laplanders had not then their round arrows, with which they bring down these animals; and we had the pleasure of seeing with what dexterity and quickness they take off the skin. The hunting season begins about Michaelmas. Almost every native of Lapland is occupied in this business, which is a considerable article of commerce. Forty skins are sold for a crown. But there is no merchandise in which a man may be more deceived, than in that of the gray squirrel and ermine; for you buy without seeing, the fur side of the skins being always turned inmost. There is

positively, that the gray squirrels of Lapland are the same animals with our French squirrels. This authority would be sufficient, were it not contradicted by other evidences. M. Regnard has written some excellent theatrical works; but he was not much versant in natural history: Neither did he remain long enough in Lapland to see the squirrels change their colour. It is true, that some naturalists, and among this number is Linnæus, tell us, that, in the northern regions, the squirrels change their colour in

is no distinction to be made. The good and bad are all sold at the same price. We learned from our Laplanders a surprising fact concerning these gray squirrels, which was afterwards confirmed by our own experience. They often change the places of their residence, and not one of them can be found, during the whole winter, where there were millions the preceding year. In their marches from one part of the country to another, when it becomes necessary to pass a lake or a river, which are very frequent in Lapland, these animals lay hold of a piece of pine or birch bark, which they draw to the edge of the water, mount upon it, and abandon themselves to the pleasure of the wind and waves. They erect their tails in the form of sails; but, if the wind blows too strong, or the waves rise high, both pilot and vessel are overturned. This kind of shipwreck, which often consists of three or four thousand sail, generally enriches some Laplanders, who find the dead bodies on the shore, and, if they have not him too long on the land, prepare the furs in the ordinary manner. But, when the winds are favourable, the poor creatures make a happy voyage, and arrive at their destined port. This remarkable fact might have the appearance of a fable, if it had not fallen within my own observation; Ouvriers de M. Regnard, tom. i. p. 163.

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winter;

winter *; which is not improbable, as, in these climates, hares, wolves, and weasels also change their colours. But this change is from yellow or red to white, and not from yellow or red to an ash-colour. But, to confine ourselves to the squirrel, Linnæus, in the *Fauna Suecica*, says, *afflate ruber, hyeme incanus*. The change, therefore, is from red to white, or rather from reddish to whitish; and it is not easy to conceive why Linnæus, in the last edition of his *Systema Naturæ*, should have substituted, in place of *incanus*, the word *cinereus*. M. Klein† assures us, on the contrary, that the squirrels in the neighbourhood of Dantzick are reddish in winter as well as in summer; and that there are, in Poland, gray and blackish squirrels as well as the reddish kind, which never change their colour. These gray and blackish squirrels are found in Canada‡, and in all parts of North America.

* *Sciurus vulgaris* habitat in arboribus frequens, æstate ruber, hyeme incanus; *Faun. Suec.* p. 9. *Sciurus vulgaris* *Æstate ruber, hyeme cinereus*; *Syst. Nat.* p. 63.

† *Sciurus vulgaris rubicundus* Noditates tam in silvis quàm in caveis vulgares et hyeme et æstate rubri . . . In Polonia utique vulgares cinerei non mutant pellem; hæc rari quoque vulgares nigricantes, &c.; *Klein Quod.* p. 53.—In Ukraina, inter *Sciurus* coloris rutili, nigricantes spectantur; *Raczynski avit. Hist. Nat. Polon.* p. 321.

‡ The Virginian squirrels are nearly of the size of rabbits. They are black, or mixed with black and white. However, the greatest number of them are ash-coloured; *Description des Isles Occidentales par Jean Levet*, p. 88.—The finest fur brought from

America. Hence the gray squirrel may be regarded as an animal common to both Continents, and of a different species from the ordinary squirrel.

Besides, we never see our squirrels, though very numerous in the forests, unite together in flocks. Neither do we ever see them travel in company, approach the waters, or traverse rivers on the bark of trees. Thus they differ from the gray squirrel, not only in size and colour, but in manners and habits; for, though the navigations of the gray squirrel seem to be hardly credible, yet they are attested by such a number of witnesses*, that we cannot say absolutely that they are false.

Of all the wild quadrupeds, the squirrel is subject, perhaps, to the greatest varieties, or whose

from the Iroquois country, is the skin of the black squirrel. This animal is as large as a cat of three months old; it is extremely vivacious, very gentle, and easily tamed. The Iroquois make robes of this fur, which they sell for seven or eight pilleles; *Charlevoix, Hist. de la Nev. France, tom. i. p. 273*.

* Rei veritate nititur, quod Gesnerus ex Vincentio Belacassi et Olao M. referet: Sciurus, quando equum transire cupiant, lignum levissimum aque imponere, eique insidentes, et cauda, non tamen ut vult, erecta, sed continuo mota, vellicantes, neque stante vento, sed tranquillo aequore transire; quod fide dignus fidelisque meos emissarios ad insulas Gothlandia plus simplici vice observavit, et cum spoliis in littoribus ibidem collectis rediit, mirabundus mihi reulit; *Dysertatione de Sciuro volante. Transact. Angl. No. 427. pag. 38. Klein de Quad. pag. 53.*—Corrice interdum sciurus navigat; *Linn. Syst. Nat. pag. 63.*

species, at least, is approached by the greatest number of neighbouring species. The white squirrel of Siberia* appears to be only a variety of the common kind. The black† and the deep gray‡ squirrels of America may be varieties of the gray squirrel. The Barbary, the palm, and the ground squirrels, are three species which make a very near approach to each other.

We have few historical facts concerning the gray squirrel. Fernandes§ remarks, that the gray or blackish squirrels of America dwell upon trees, and particularly upon the pine; that they feed upon fruits and seeds; that they amass provisions for the winter, which they deposit in the holes of trees, where they also retire to pass the severe season; that in these holes the females bring forth their young, &c. Thus the manners of the gray squirrel differ from those of the common kind, who build nests, like the birds, on the tops of trees. We cannot, however, pretend to determine absolutely that this blackish squirrel of Fernandes is the same with the gray squirrel of Virginia, or that both of them are the same with the gray squirrel of Europe. We only

* *Sciurus albus Sibericus*; *L'écureuil blanc de Sibérie*; *Bryf. Gen. Regn. Anim.* p. 151.

† *Sciurus Mexicanus*; *Hernand. Hist. Mexic.* p. 382.—*Sciurus niger*; *L'écureuil noir*; *Briffou. Regn. Anim.* p. 151.

‡ *L'écureuil d'Amérique*; *Selsa, vol. i. p. 78. tab. 48. fig. 50*.—*Sciurus obscurus cinereus*.—*Sciurus Americanus*; *Briffou. Regn. Anim.* p. 152.

§ *Francisci Fernandes*; *Hist. Animal. Nov. Orbis*, p. 8.

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mention it as a probability; for these three animals are nearly of the same size and colour, inhabit the same climates, have precisely the same figure, and their skins are equally used under the denomination of the *gray fur*, or the fur of the *gray squirrel*.