

found these two animals in the cabinet of M. Aubry, who obligingly permitted us to describe and draw them.

The pekan has so strong a resemblance to the pine weasel, and the vison * to the martin, that they may be regarded as varieties of these species. They not only have the same figure, the same proportions, the same length of tail, the same quality of hair, but the same number of teeth and claws, and the same instinct and manners. Hence we may conclude, that the pekan is a variety of the pine weasel, and the vison a variety of the martin, or, at least, that the species are so allied, that they exhibit no real differences. The hair of the pekan and vison is only browner, and more lustrous and silky than that of the pine weasel and the martin. But this difference, it is well known, is common to them with the beaver, the otter, and other animals of North America, whose furs are more beautiful than those of the same animals in the North of Europe.

* I am inclined to think, that the animal mentioned by Sagard Theodat, under the name of *otagay*, is the same with the vison. 'The ottagay,' he remarks, 'is as large as a small rabbit. Its hair is very black, and so soft, polished, and fine, that it resembles velvet.' The Canadians are fond of these skins, and make garments of them; *Poyage au Pays des Hurons*, p. 308. No Canadian animal corresponds so well with this description as the vison.

THE SABLE*.

THE sable is mentioned by almost every naturalist, without knowing more of it than the skin. M. Gmelin is the first who gave a figure and description of this animal. He saw two of them alive in the house of the governor of Tobolski. 'The sable,' says he, 'resembles the martin in the form and habit of body, and the weasel in the teeth. It has six

* Sable weasel, with long whiskers, rounded ears, and long bushy tail. The colour of the hair is black at the tips, and cinereous at the bottom; the chin is cinereous, and the edges of the ears yellowish. Sometimes the hair is of a tawny cast; for, in spring, after shedding the coat, the colour varies. There are instances of their being found of a snowy whiteness. The usual length, from nose to tail, is about eighteen inches, and that of the tail ten; *Pennant's Synops. of Quad.* p. 217.

Zobel, in German; *Sobol*, in Polish; *Sabbel*, in Swedish; *Zibellier*, in German; *Zibelline*, in French.

Zobels; *Agricoll. An. sibiric.* p. 425.

Musella Sobella; *Geyer, Quad.* p. 768.

Musella Zibellina, the sable; *Rail Syn. Quad.* p. 201. *Klein. Quad.* p. 64.

Musella Zibellina, *Aristotelis Satherius*, Nipho, Cebalas, *Alciatus*. *Mos Sarmaticus et Scythicus*; *Charlevoix Exercit.* p. 20.

Musella Zibellina, pedibus fuscis, corpore obscure fulvo, fronte exalbida, gutture cinereo; *Linna. Syst. Nat.* p. 68.

Musella Zibellina; *Nov. Com. Petrop. tom. v.* p. 330. *tab. 6.*

Martes Zibellina; *Musella obscura fulva*, gutture cinereo; *Briffon. Quad.* p. 180. *Animalium quatuordecim Quadrip. Descript.* *Auctore Georg. Gmelin.*

'cutting teeth pretty long, and a little crooked,
'and two canine in the under jaw, and small
'sharp teeth in the upper. It has long whiskers round the mouth, and large feet, all
'armed with five claws. These characters were
'common to both the fables. But the one was
'of a blackish brown colour all over the body,
'except the ears, and below the chin, where
'the hair was a little yellow. The other was
'smaller, and of a yellowish brown colour,
'with the ears and under part of the chin of a
'paler cast. These are their winter colours;
'for, in spring, they change by the shedding of
'the hair. The first sable, which was of a
'blackish brown, changes into a brownish yellow
'low in spring; and the second, which was of
'a yellowish brown, becomes a pale yellow. I
'admired,' continues M. Gmelin, 'the agility
'of these animals. Whenever they perceive a
'cat, they rise upon their hind-feet, to prepare
'for the combat. In the night, they are extremely
'restless and active *. During the day,
'on the contrary, and particularly after eating,
'they generally sleep half an hour or an hour,
'when they may be pushed, shaken, and even
'pricked, without awaking.' From this description we learn, that the fables are not all of

* This restless activity during the night is not peculiar to the sable. The same thing I remarked in two ermines, which I kept for several months.

the

the same colour; and, consequently, that the nomenclators, who describe them by the spots and colours of the hair, have employed a fallacious character; for their colour not only varies in different seasons, but the individuals of the same and of different climates differ from each other.

The fables inhabit the banks of rivers, and the thickest parts of the woods. They leap with great agility from tree to tree, and avoid the rays of the sun, which are said, in a short time, to change the colour of their hair. It is pretended, that they conceal themselves, and lie in a torpid state during the winter *; and yet this is the best season for hunting them, because their fur is then better and more beautiful than in summer. They live upon rats, fishes, pine tops, and wild fruits. They are very ardent in their amours: During their season of love, they emit a strong odour, and their excrements, at all times, have a disagreeable smell. They are chiefly found in Siberia: There are not

* Of the two fables mentioned by M. Gmelin, the first came from the province of Tomskien, and the second from that of Beresowien. We likewise learn, from his account of Siberia, that there are on the mountains of Sopka Sinia, black fables with short hair, the hunting of which is prohibited; and that a similar kind is also found in the more advanced mountains, as well as among the Calmucks Vrangai. 'I saw,' says he, 'some of their skins which the Calmucks had brought down: They are distinguished by the name of *Kangaraga fables*;' *Voyage de Gmelin*, tom. i. p. 217.

many

many of them in the forests of Great Russia, and still fewer in Lapland. The blackest fables are most esteemed*. The sable differs from all other furs in this circumstance, that the hair turns with equal ease to any side.

The hunting of the fables is carried on by criminals confined to Siberia, or by soldiers sent for the purpose, who generally remain there several years. Both are obliged to furnish a certain quantity of furs. They shoot with a single ball, to injure the skin as little as possible; and sometimes, instead of fire-arms, they use cross-bows and small arrows. As the success of this hunting requires much address and assiduity, the officers are allowed to encourage the soldiers, by giving them a proportional part of all the fables they kill above what they are obliged to furnish weekly, which turns out to be a considerable premium †.

* The sable differs from the martin by being smaller, and having finer and longer hair. The true fables are damasked with black, and are taken in Tartary. There are few of them in Lapland. The fur is esteemed in proportion to the blackness of the hair, and sometimes sells at sixty crowns, though the width of the skin exceeds not four inches. Some of them have been seen white, and others gray; *Régnard, tom. i. p. 176.* Schoeder likewise remarks, that white fables are sometimes found; *Hist. de la Laponie, p. 318.*

† A colonel, from seven years service in hunting fables, may draw, of clear profit, four thousand crowns, the subalterns in proportion, and each soldier six or seven hundred; *Voyage du P. Avril, p. 169.* See also *Relat. de la Nouvelle, par le Sieur de la Laponie, p. 217.*

Some

Some naturalists have suspected that the sable is the *fatherius* of Aristotle; and I believe their conjecture is well founded. The fineness of the fur is a proof that the animals are often in water; and travellers inform us*, that they are never very numerous, but in small islands, where the hunters go in quest of them. Besides, Aristotle mentions the *fatherius* as a water animal, and ranks it with the otter and beaver. It is likewise to be presumed, that, when Athens was in its splendor, these beautiful furs were known in Greece, and that the animal which furnished them had a name. Now, there is no name which can more properly be applied to the sable, than that of *fatherius*, especially if it be true that the sable eats fish †, and continues so much in the water as to be reckoned amphibious.

S U P P L E M E N T.

TO the article sable we have nothing to add but some facts, related by the Russian travellers, which are published in the last volumes of the *Hist. Gen. des Voyages*.

* The hunters go to the small islands in quest of fables, where they retire. They are killed with a kind of cross-bows, &c.; *Voyage du P. Avril, p. 168.*

† In umbrosis salibus versatur semper, insiliatur avicula.—*In eam assumit mures, pisces, avas rubcas; Ranzingki, Auct. Hist. Nat. Pales. p. 318.*

‘ The fables live in holes of corrupted trees, or under their roots, or on rocky eminences. Their nests are constructed with moss, branches of trees, and turf. In these holes, or nests, they continue twelve hours, both in summer and winter. The remainder of their time is occupied in quest of subsistence. In spring, they feed upon weasels, ermines, squirrels, and especially hares. But, in the fruit season, they eat bay-berries, and the fruit of the service-tree. In winter, they catch small birds and woodcocks. When the snow falls, they retire to their holes, where they remain sometimes three weeks. They copulate in the month of January. Their amours continue one month, and often produce bloody combats between the males. After copulation, they remain in their nests about 15 days. The females bring forth about the end of March, and produce from three to five young, whom they suckle four or six months.

‘ The hunters go in companies of forty, in quest of these animals during the winter only, and use canoes, with provisions for three or four months. They have a chief, who, when they arrive at the rendezvous, assigns to each band a particular quarter, and all the hunters are obliged to obey him. The snow is removed from the places where the snares are to be laid; and each hunter prepares twenty of them daily. The hunters choose a small spot in the vicinity of trees, surround it, to a certain

‘ certain height, with sharp flakes, and cover it with thin planks, to prevent the entrance of the snow. They leave a narrow passage, above which is placed a beam, supported only by a small twig; and, as soon as the sable touches it to carry off the piece of flesh or fish, put there for a bait, the beam falls and kills the animal. All the fables are brought to the general conductor; or, rather, they are concealed in the holes of trees, to prevent the Tongusians, or other savage people, from stealing them. When the fables are averse to enter these snares, the hunters have recourse to nets. When a hunter discovers the tract of a sable, he follows it till he discovers its hole, and, by means of smoke, obliges the animal to come out. He then extends his net; and continues lying in wait, in this manner, with his dogs, for two or three days successively. This net is thirteen fathoms long, and four or five in height. When the sable leaves its hole, it seldom escapes; for the dogs slay it when entangled by the net. When discovered on the trees, the hunter shoots them with blunt arrows, to prevent the skins from being injured. The hunting being finished, the company assemble at the general rendezvous, and reembark as soon as the rivers become navigable by the melting of the ice.’