

THE RABBIT*.

AS the hare and rabbit, though very similar both in external form and internal structure, never intermix, they constitute two distinct species. However, as it has been maintained by hunters †, that the male hares, in the rutting season, pursue and cover female rabbits, I endeavoured to discover what would result from this union. For this purpose, I reared together male rabbits and female hares, and female rabbits and male hares. But nothing was produced from these trials. I only learned from them, that

* The ears of the common rabbit are almost naked. The colour of the fur, in a wild state, is brown; that of the tail is black above and white beneath. In a domestic state, the colour varies from black to pied and perfectly white; the eyes of the tail are of a fine red; Pennant's *Synopf. of Quad.* p. 251.

In Greek, *Δορυμύς*; in Latin, *Cuniculus*; in Italian, *Coniglio*; in Spanish, *Conej*; in Portuguese, *Caílo*; in German, *Cani-niden*; in Swedish, *Kæne*; in old French, *Cœne*, *Cœnil*.

Lepus vel *Lepusculus* *Hispānicus*; *Göf. r. Icos. Anim. Quad.* p. 105.

Cuniculus, *Raii Synopf. Quad.* p. 205. *Plinii, lib. viii. c. 55.*

CHAR. GEN. Dentes primores II. superiores duplicati; interioribus minoribus.—CHAR. SPEC. *Lepus cuniculus*, cauda abbreviata, auriculis nudatis; *Linn. Syst. Nat.* p. 251.

Lepusculus, *cuniculus* terram fodiens; *Klein. Quad. Hist. Nat.* p. 52.

Lepus caudatus pilis tenuissimis et longissimis toto corpore vestitus; *Brisson. Quad.* p. 141.

† La Venerie de du Fouilloux, p. 100.

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these animals, though very similar in form, are so different in their natures, as to be incapable of producing mules. I put a young hare and a young female rabbit in the same apartment; but they lived not together three months. As soon as they acquired a little strength, they became mortal enemies, and their continual wars terminated in the death of the hare. Of two male hares farther advanced in life, which I confined separately with a female rabbit, one suffered the same fate; and the other, which was very strong, and very ardent, perpetually tormented the rabbit with attempts to cover her, and at last killed her by wounds, or by too violent caresses. I made similar trials with three or four male rabbits, and an equal number of female hares; but the latter died in a still shorter time. Though nothing was produced, I am inclined to think that they sometimes actually coupled. It is certain, at least, that, notwithstanding the resistance of the female, the male was gratified: And it was more reasonable to expect fruit from these mixtures than from that of the rabbit and hen, which, according to a certain author, would produce *chickens covered with hair, or rabbits covered with feathers* *. This ridiculous conclusion was drawn from a vicious male rabbit, which, having no female, used a hen in the same manner as he would any other moveable. It was

* See l'Art d'Élever des Poullets.

extremely

extremely improbable, that two species, so remote from each other, should be fertile, while nothing results from the union of the hare and rabbit, whose species are so very analogous.

The fecundity of the rabbit is still greater than that of the hare. Without believing, with Wotton, that, from a single pair put upon an island, six millions were found at the end of one year, it is certain that these animals multiply so prodigiously in a country which is commodious for them, that the produce of the earth is not sufficient to afford them subsistence. They devour herbs, roots, grain, fruits, and even young trees and shrubs; and if not furnished with dogs and ferrets, the inhabitants would be obliged to desert these countries. The rabbit not only produces more frequently, and in greater number than the hare, but has likewise more resources for escaping his enemies. He easily abstracts himself from the observation of man. The holes which he digs in the earth, where he retires during the day, and impregnates his mate, protect him from the ravages of the wolf, the fox, and birds of prey. Here the whole family live in perfect security. The females nourish their young about two months, and never allow them to go out of their retreat till they are able to shift for themselves. By this means, they avoid all the dangers of youth; while more hares, on the contrary, are destroyed during this period than in all the after-part of their lives.

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This management is alone sufficient to prove that the rabbit is superior in sagacity to the hare. The structure of both is the same, and might enable them equally to dig retreats in the earth. Both are equally timid; but the talents of the one being weaker than those of the other, he contents himself with forming a seat on the surface of the ground, where he remains perpetually exposed; while the rabbit, endowed with a superior instinct, digs for himself an asylum in the earth. This labour is unquestionably the effect of sentiment; for domestic rabbits never give themselves the trouble of digging. They dispense with digging retreats, for the same reason that domestic birds dispense with building nests, because they are equally sheltered from the inconveniences and dangers to which wild birds and wild rabbits are continually liable. It has often been remarked, that, when a warren is attempted to be replenished with domestic rabbits, both they and their offspring remain, like the hares, upon the surface; and that they never begin to dig holes for their protection, till after they have endured many hardships, and passed through several generations.

The colours of the domestic rabbit vary like those of all other domestic animals; for we have white, black, brown, and spotted rabbits. The black rabbits are rarer than the white, brown, or variegated kinds. All wild rabbits are brown; and even among the domestic ones, it is still the predomi-

predominant colour; for in every litter, though both male and female be white, or both black, or the one white and the other black, some of the young are always brown. It is seldom that above two or three resemble the parents. But the brown rabbits, though in a domestic state, generally produce young of their own colour only; and it is very rare, and as by accident, that they bring forth white, black, or mixed kinds.

At the age of five or six months, these animals are capable of procreating. They are said to be constant in their amours; and after attaching themselves to a particular female, generally never quit her. The female is almost perpetually in a condition for receiving the male. She goes with young thirty or thirty-one days, and produces from four to eight at a litter. Like the female hare, she has a double uterus, and consequently may bring forth at two different times. Superfutations, however, seem to be less frequent in this species than in that of the hare. This circumstance may, perhaps, be owing to the constancy of the females, and to their indulging in fewer adventures and unseasonable embraces.

Some days before bringing forth, they dig a new hole, not in a straight line, but angular; at the bottom of which they make an excavation; and they pull great quantities of hair off their bellies, and make a bed of it for the reception of their young. During the two first days, they

never leave their offspring: They never go out but when pressed with hunger, and return as soon as they have filled their stomach, which they do with surprising quickness. In this manner they tend and suckle their young for more than six weeks, during which the father has no knowledge of them. He never enters the hole dug by the mother; and the female, when she leaves her young, frequently shuts up the mouth of the hole with earth diluted in her own urine. But, when they begin to come to the mouth of the hole, and to eat groundsel, or other herbs, presented to them by the mother, the father seems to know them: He takes them between his paws, smooths their hair, and licks their eyes. Each of them, one after another, equally partakes of his care and attention. He receives, at the same time, many caresses from the mother; and, in a few days afterward, she is generally impregnated.

I received the following remarks from M. le Chapt du Moutier, who has amused himself for several years in rearing rabbits: 'I began,' says he, 'with only one male and one female. The male was perfectly white, and the female brown. In their posterity, which was very numerous, the brown greatly predominated; there was a considerable number of them white and mixed, and some black. When the female is in season, the male seldom quits her. His constitution is so vigorous and ardent, that I have

* seen

Plate LXII.



HARE

Plate LXIII.



DOMESTIC RABBIT

Plate LXIV.



SILVER HAIRD RABBIT

Plate LXV



RABBIT of ANGORA

Plate LXVI



RABBIT of ANGORA
Casting its Hair

‘ seen him embrace the female five or six times
‘ in less than an hour. In the time of coition,
‘ the female lies flat on her belly, with her four
‘ paws stretched out; and she utters small cries,
‘ which rather indicate pleasure than pain. Their
‘ manner of coupling resembles that of the cats,
‘ with this difference, that the male bites the
‘ neck of the female with less violence. These
‘ animals pay much respect to their fathers,
‘ which I discovered by the great deference my
‘ rabbits entertained for their original father, who
‘ was easily distinguished by his whiteness, being
‘ the only male of this colour which I preserved.
‘ The family soon increased: But those who had
‘ likewise become fathers, were always subordi-
‘ nate to their first sire. Whenever they fought,
‘ either for females or food, the grandfather ran
‘ up to them with full speed; and, as soon as they
‘ perceived him, order was re-established. If
‘ he surprised them in the act, he first separated
‘ the combatants, and then gave them an exem-
‘ plary punishment. I had still a farther pro-
‘ of his dominion over his posterity. Having
‘ accustomed them to retire into their apartment
‘ upon the blowing of a whistle, when I gave
‘ the signal, however distant they might be, the
‘ grandfather put himself at their head, and,
‘ though he arrived first, he allowed them all to
‘ pass before, and entered last himself. I fed
‘ them with bran, hay, and a good deal of juni-
VOL. IV. L per;

' per; of this last they eat the berries, the leaves,
' the bark, and leave nothing but the wood.
' This food gave a fine flavour to their flesh,
' and made it equally good as that of the wild
' rabbit.'

These animals live eight or nine years. As they pass the greatest part of their lives in holes, where they enjoy perfect tranquillity, they grow much fatter than hares. Their flesh differs likewise both in colour and taste. The flesh of the young rabbit is very delicate; but that of the old is dry and hard. As I formerly remarked, they are originally natives of warm climates. They were known to the Greeks*; Greece and Spain† seem to be the only places in Europe where they anciently existed. From thence they were transported into more temperate regions, as Italy, France, Germany, Britain, where they are now naturalized. But, in very cold countries, as Sweden‡, and other parts of the north, they cannot be reared in houses, and they perish when abandoned to the fields. But, on the contrary, they are fond of excessive heat; for we find them in the most southern parts of Asia and Africa, as along the Persian Gulf§, the bay of

* Arist. Hist. Animal. lib. i. cap. 1.

† Plin. Hist. Nat. lib. viii.

‡ Linnæi Faun. Suec. p. viii.

§ L'Hist. Gen. des Voyages, par M. l'Abbé Prévôt, tom. ii.

Saldana*, in Lybia, Senegal, and Guiney†. They are likewise found in our American islands‡, where they have been brought from Europe, and have succeeded extremely well.

* L'Hist. Gen. des Voyages, par M. l'Abbé Prévôt, tom. ii.

P. 449.

† Leon. Afric. de Afric. descript. part. ii. p. 257. Le Voyage de Guill. Bosman, p. 252.

‡ L'Hist. Gen. des Antilles, par le P. de Terte, tom. ii.

P. 297.