

# The MOUFFETTES, or Stinking POLECATS.

WE have given the generic name *mouffette* to three or four species of animals, which, when disturbed, send forth an odour so strong and offensive, that it suffocates like the subterraneous vapour called *mouffette*. These animals are found in all the southern and temperate regions of America\*: They have been indistinctly mentioned by travellers under the names of *sinking beasts*, *devil's children*†, &c. and not

\* But, above all, I cannot pass over without mentioning a little creature, with a bushy tail, which we called a *hagor*, because when he sets sight on you, he stands vapouring and putting with his fore-feet upon the ground, and yet hath no manner of defence for himself but with his breech; for, upon your approaching near him, he turns about his backside, and squirts at you, accompanied with the most abominable stink in the world; *Dampier*, vol. iv. p. 96. — In Peru, there are numbers of small foxes, some of which send forth an intolerable smell. During the night, they come into the towns, and, however close the windows, their odour is felt at the distance of a hundred paces. Happily their number is not great, otherwise they would stink the whole world; *Hist. des Incas*, tom. ii. p. 269.

† There is a kind of martin, called the *devil's child*, or *sinking beast*, because, when pursued, its urine infects the air for more than a quarter of a mile round. In other respects,

not only confounded with each other, but with animals of very different species. Hernandez\* has pretty clearly pointed out three of them. The first he calls *yiquipatl*, a Mexican name, which, were it easily pronounced, we would retain. He has given a description and figure of it; and it is the same animal of which we have also a figure in Seba †. We shall call it *coase*, from the name *squash*, which it receives in New Spain ‡. The second Hernandez likewise

specifies, it is a beautiful animal. It is of the size of a small cat, but thicker. Its hair is lustrous and grayish, with two white lines that form, on its back, an oval figure from the neck to the tail, which is bushy like that of the fox, and erect, like that of the squirrel; *Hist. de la Nov. France, par le P. Charlevoix, tom. iii. p. 343. Note.* This is the animal we shall here call the *coasepatl*, which is its Mexican name.

\* *Yiquipatl* seu *Vulpulca* quæ Malizium torrefactum simulatur colore. *Genus grinnon*. . . . . sunt et alia duo hujus vulpculæ generis eadem forma et natura, quorum alterum *yiquipatl* etiam vocatum, fasciis multis caudentibus distinguatur; alterum vero *coasepatl* seu vulpculæ puerilis nomen tantum utriusque ducta, perque eadem ipsam eodem modo delata; *Hernand. Hist. Mex. p. 332. fig. ibid.*

† Seba, vol. i. p. 68. tab. 42. fig. 1.

‡ The *Squash* is a quadruped larger than a cat; and its head resembles that of a fox. He has short ears, and sharp claws, which enable him to climb trees like a cat. His feet are covered with fine, short, yellowish hair; and his flesh is very good and wholesome; *Dampier, vol. iii. p. 302.*

Stillinger wensel, with a short slender nose, short ears and legs, a black body, full of hair, and a long tail, of a black and white colour. The length, from nose to tail, is about eighteen inches; *Pearson's Synops. of Quad. p. 250.*

Yiquipatl; *Hernand. Mexic. p. 332. Reiz. Synops. Quad. p. 181. Klein. Quad. p. 72.*

Méles

calls *yiquipatl*, and which we shall denominate *chiuche*, from the name it obtains in South America\*. The third Hernandez calls *coneapatl*, which name we shall preserve, and is the same animal with that given by Catelby, under the denomination of the *American polecat* †, and by Brisson,

*Méles Serriamentis; Brisson, Quad. p. 185.*

Ichoemou de Yiquipatl; *Seba, Mus. tom. i. tab. 42.*

\* The trunk wensel, with short rounded ears, black cheeks, and a white stripe from the nose, between the ears, to the back. The upper part of the neck and the whole back are white, divided at the bottom by a black line, commencing at the tail, and passing a little way up the back. The belly and the tail, and passing a little way up the back. The belly and legs are white. The tail is very full of long coarse hair, generally black, and sometimes tipped with white; that figured by M. de Buffon is entirely white. It has very long nails on all the feet, like those on the fore-feet of a badger. It is somewhat less than the European polecat; *Pearson's Synops. of Quad. p. 250.*

Chiuche; *Sauvage, Oby. Pers. p. 271.*

Skunk, *Sikatta*; *Kalm's Voy. Ferster's Trav. vol. i. p. 273. tab. 2. Jolly's Voy. p. 85.*

Enfant du diable, Bête puante; *Charlevoix, Nov. Franç. tom. v. p. 196.*

† This animal in shape is not unlike our common polecat, except that the nose of this is somewhat longer: The colour of all I have seen is black and white, though not always alike marked. This had a list of white, extending from the hind part of the head along the ridge of the back, to the rump; with four others, two on each side, running parallel with it; *Catelby's Nat. Hist. of Carolina, vol. ii. p. 62.*

The striped wensel, with rounded ears; head, neck, belly, legs, and tail, black; the back and sides marked with five parallel white lines, one on the top of the back, the others on each side. The second line extends some way up the tail, which is long and bushy towards the end. It is of the size of an European polecat; only the back is more arched. The disposition

Briffon, under that of the *striped polecat* \*. We are acquainted with a fourth species, which we call *zorilla*, the name it receives in Peru and other parts of South America.

We are indebted for our knowledge of two of these animals to M. Aubry, whose taste and skill in natural history are conspicuous in his cabinet, which is one of the most curious in Paris. He obligingly communicated to us all his treasures, as often as we required them; and this will not be the only opportunity we shall have of expressing our gratitude. The animals we borrowed from M. Aubry, in order to have them drawn and engraved, are the *coase*, the *chinche*, and the *zorilla*; the two last of which may be regarded as new; because there is no figure of them to be found in any author.

position of the stripes varies; Pennant's *Synops. of Quad.* p. 232.

Polecat or skunk; *Loxofelis Carolina*; *Catagly's Carolina*.

Mustela Americana fuscida; *Klein, Quad.* p. 64.

Viverra putorius, fusca, lineis quatuor dorsalibus, parallelis, al. bis; *Linn. Syst. Nat.* p. 64.

\* The *zorilla* weasel has the back and sides marked with stripes of black and white; the last tinged with yellow. The tail is long and bushy, part white and part black. The legs and belly are black. It is smaller than the skunk; *Pennant's Synops. of Quad.* p. 235.

Mustela nigra, tenuis in dorso alba, putorius striatus. Le Pe-  
tois rayé; *Briffon*, p. 181.

Away of the Indians; *Zerrinas* of the Spaniards: *Garcil. de la*  
*Vega*, p. 331.

Mariposa, Masutilliqui; *Gamilla, Orisnoque*, tom. iii. p. 240.

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The first of these animals was transmitted to M. Aubry, under the name of *pekan*, *devil's child*, or *coild cat of Virginia*. I perceived that it was not the *pekan*, rejected all the compound denominations, and discovered that it was the *yssicpatl* of Hernandez, and the *squash* of other travellers; from which last appellation I derived the name *coase*. It is about sixteen inches long, including the head and body. The legs are short, the muzzle thin, and the ears small. The hair is of a deep brown colour, and the claws are black and sharp. It lives in the holes and cliffs of rocks, where the female brings forth her young. It feeds upon beetles, worms, and small birds; and, when it gets admission to the court-yards, it destroys the poultry, of which it only eats the brain. When afraid or irritated, it emits an odour so abominable, that neither men nor dogs dare approach. Its urine, which apparently mingles with this pestiferous odour, stains and infects in an indelible manner. It appears, however, that this disagreeable odour is not constant: 'This animal,' Seba remarks, 'was sent me alive from Surinam; and I kept it during a whole summer in my garden, where it was secured by a small chain. It ne-

\* *Yssicpatl*, whose colour resembles that of burnt maize.— Its head is like that of a young fox; and its front is nearly like that of a hog. The Americans call it *guaje*; *Seba*, vol. i. p. 68. *Nur*. This authority is a farther proof that *squash*, or *coase*, is the true name of the animal.

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‘ ver bit any person; and when it was presented  
 ‘ with food, it allowed itself to be handled like  
 ‘ a small dog. It dug the earth with its snout  
 ‘ and fore-feet, which were armed with long  
 ‘ crooked claws. During the day, it concealed  
 ‘ itself in a kind of den which it had made. It  
 ‘ came out in the night, and, after trimming its  
 ‘ self, began to run about, from right to left, as  
 ‘ far as its chain would permit; and this exercise  
 ‘ it continued till morning. It searched every  
 ‘ where with its nose on the ground. It was  
 ‘ served with victuals every night, and never  
 ‘ took any food but what was agreeable to its  
 ‘ nature. It was not fond of flesh, bread, and  
 ‘ several other kinds of nourishment. Maybugs,  
 ‘ boiled shrimps, caterpillars, and spiders, were  
 ‘ its chief delicacies. About the end of autumn,  
 ‘ it was found dead in its hole, being unable to  
 ‘ endure the cold. The hair on the back is of a  
 ‘ deep chestnut colour; the ears are short; the  
 ‘ forehead is round, and of a brighter colour  
 ‘ than the back; and the belly is yellow. The  
 ‘ tail is of a moderate length, covered with short  
 ‘ brown hair, and a kind of yellowish rings were  
 ‘ perceptible all round it.’

Though Seba’s description and figure correspond very well with those of Hernandez, it may be doubted whether they relate to the same animal; because Seba makes no mention of the detestable odour, which he must unquestionably have perceived in the course of a whole summer,  
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during which he kept the animal in his garden. But no such doubt will remain, after we are informed, that this animal does not send forth its disagreeable odour, unless when irritated or frightened; and that it is often tamed and kept in houses by the inhabitants of different parts of America\*.

Of these four species of *mouffettes*, to which we have given the name of *coase*, *concpail*, *chincher*, and *xorilla*, the two last belong to the warmest climates of South America, and may be varieties only, and not distinct species. The two first inhabit the more temperate climates of New Spain, Louisiana, the Illinois, Carolina, &c. and appear to be different species, particularly the *coase*, which has only four toes on the fore-feet, while all the others have five. But all these animals have the same figure, the same instincts, the same pestiferous odour, and may be

\* Notwithstanding the offensive quality of these animals, they are sometimes tamed by the English, French, Swedes, and Savages of North America. They are said to follow their masters like domestic animals, and that they do not throw out their urine, unless when beat or irritated. When a Savage kills any of them, he cuts out the bladder, to prevent their flesh, which is good eating, from being infected with the smell of the urine. I often met with English and French, who informed me, that they had eaten this flesh, and found it to be very well tasted, approaching nearly to the flavour of a pig. The Europeans put no value on the skin, on account of the length and coarseness of the hair; but the savages make purses of it, &c.; *Kalm’s Travels*, p. 417.

said to differ only in the length and colour of their hair. The coase is of a pretty uniform brown colour. The coneptal\*, upon a black ground-colour, has five white bands which ex-

\* The English denominate *polecat* a species of animal which is common not only in Pennsylvania, but in several other more northern and southern provinces of America. In New-York its vulgar name is *skunk*; and the Swedes in that country call it *skattie*. . . This animal has a great resemblance to the marten, and is generally of a black colour, with three white bands which run longitudinally from head to tail. Some of them have been seen, though rarely, almost entirely white. . . . This animal brings forth its young in burrows, or in hollow trees: It continues not always on the ground, but mounts upon trees. It is an enemy to birds; for it breaks their eggs and eats their young. When it gets admission to a hen-house, it makes great havoc. . . . When hunted, either by men or dogs, he runs as well as he can, or climbs up a tree; and, when hard pushed, he dares forth his urine against his pursuers. . . . The odour of his urine is so strong, that it suffocates. If a drop of this pestiferous fluid falls upon the eyes, the person is in danger of losing his sight; and, when it falls upon a man's clothes, it is extremely difficult to extract the smell. Most dogs fly from him the moment they feel this odour. It requires more than a month to remove the smell from fluffs of any kind. . . . In the woods, it is often felt at a great distance. In the year 1749, one of these animals came near the place where I lodged. It was in winter and during the night. The dogs were awakened, and pursued it. In a moment, it diffused an odour so fetid, that I was almost suffocated in my bed, and the cows bellowed in a hideous manner. . . . About the end of the same year, another of them slipped into our cave; but it diffused not the smallest odour, which it never does, unless when pursued or irritated. A woman perceived its eyes sparkle in the dark, and killed it. The cave was instantly filled with such a noxious odour, that the woman was not only sick for several days, but the bread, meat, and other provisions were so infected, that they were obliged to be thrown away; *Kalm's Travels*, p. 412.

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tend longitudinally from the head to the tail. The chinche\* is white on the back, and black on the flanks, with a head entirely black, except a white line which extends from the nap of the neck to the chanfrin of the nose. Its tail is bushy, and covered with very long white hair;

\* This animal was called *chinche* by the natives of Brazil. It is of the size of a cat. Its head is long, and tapers toward the end of the upper jaw, which advances beyond the under, and both form a mouth that extends to the external angles of the eyes, which are long and narrow: The uvea is black, and all the rest white. The ears are large, and nearly resemble those of a man, and their whole structure indicates a delicate sense of hearing. Two white hands arise on the head, pass over the ears, and, receding from each other, terminate in an arch upon the sides of the belly. Its legs are short, and the paws are divided into five toes, armed with black claws, with which it digs holes in the earth. Its back is arched like that of a hog, and its belly is flat. The tail is of equal length with the body, and differs not from that of the fox. The hair is of a dark gray colour, and as long as that of a cat. It burrows in the earth like a rabbit; but its hole is not so deep. I have had much difficulty in extracting the bad smell of this animal from my clothes which had been infected by it. Though several times washed, soaked, and dried in the sun, it continued more than eight days. I was informed that this smell proceeds from the animal's urine, which it discharges on its tail, and by this means disperses it all around, in order to put the enemy to flight by the intolerable stench; that, for the same purpose, it urinates in the entry to its habitation; that it is very fond of small birds and poultry; and that it is the chief cause of the destruction of birds in the country of Buenos-aires; *Journal du P. Feuillée*, p. 272.—Note. The chinche appears to be the same animal with the *chincilla* mentioned by Acosta. 'The chincillas,' he remarks, 'are small animals like squirrels, and their hair is wonderfully soft and smooth. . . . They are found in the Sierra de Pera; *Hist. Nat. du Indes Occident.* p. 199.

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mixed with a little black. The zorilla\*, which is called *mapurita* †, seems to be a smaller species. Its tail, however, is as bushy and as beautiful as that of the chinche, from which it differs in the disposition of the spots in the fur. The ground-colour of the zorilla is black, upon which there are longitudinal white bands, extending from the head to the middle of the back, and other transverse white bands on the flanks, the crupper, and the origin of the tail, which is black, as far as the middle, and then white to the extremity; but the tail of the chinche is of one uniform colour. All these animals ‡ are nearly

\* The zorilla of New Spain is as large as a cat, with black and white hair, and a very fine tail. When pursued, it discharges its urine as a defence; for the stench of this excretion is so strong, that it poisons the air all round to the distance of a hundred paces, and prevents the enemy from advancing. If it falls upon clothes, they must be buried for some time under the ground, in order to remove the stench; *Voyage de Gemelli Careri*, tom. vi. p. 232.

† The *mapurita* is an animal on the banks of the Orinoco, and is perhaps the most beautiful, and, at the same time, the most detestable of all creatures. The Whites of America call it *mapurita*, and the Indians *mapatigaiti*. Its body is all spotted with black and white, and its tail is adorned with beautiful hair. It is an active, mischievous, and strong animal. . . . The stench of its odour, which extends to a great distance, is so intolerable, that I was once almost suffocated by it. . . . The Indians, however, eat its flesh, and adorn themselves with its skin, which has no bad smell; *Hist. Nat. de l'Orénoque, par Guaiilla*, tom. iii. p. 240.

‡ In Louisiana, there is a small animal of considerable beauty, but whose urine poisons the air to the distance of more than a league; for this reason, it is called the *stinking dog*.

of the same figure, and of the size of an European polecat, which they resemble still more in their manners. The physical results of their organization are likewise the same. Of all the animals on this continent, the polecat diffuses the most disagreeable odour. This odour is only more exalted in the mouffettes, whose species or varieties are numerous in America. But, in the

*dog*. It is as large as a cat. The male is of a fine black colour; the female is likewise black, and spotted with white. Its eyes are extremely vivacious. . . . I once killed one of these animals, and my dog having darted upon it, returned and fawned upon me. A drop of the blood, and doubtless also the urine, was left upon my coat, which was made of hunting tickling. The smell was so intolerable, that I was obliged to run home to change my clothes, &c. *Hist. de la Louisiane, par le Page du Pratz*, tom. ii. p. 86. — When one of these animals is attacked by a dog, to appear formidable, it so changes its usual form, by bristling up its hairs, and contracting its length into a round form, that it makes a very terrible appearance. This menacing behaviour, however insufficient to deter its enemy, is seconded by a repulsive far more prevailing; for, from some secret duct, it emits such stink offensive, that the atmosphere, for a large space round, shall be so infected with them, that men and other animals are impatient till they are quit of it. This stench is unupportable to some dogs, and necessitates them to let their game escape; others, by thrusting their noses into the earth, renew their attacks till they have killed it, but rarely care to have more to do with such noisome game, which, for four or five hours, distracts them. The Indians, notwithstanding, esteem their flesh a dainty, of which I have eat, and found it well tasted. I have known them brought up young, made domestic, and prove tame and very active, without exercising that faculty, which fear and self-preservation, perhaps, only prompt them to. They hide themselves in hollow trees and rocks, and are found in most of the northern continents of America. Their food is insects and wild fruit; *Catby's Carolina*, vol. ii. p. 62.



Old Continent, the species of the polecat is single; for I believe not that the animal mentioned by Kolbe, under the name of the *slinking badger*\*, which appears to be a real mouffette, exists at the Cape of Good Hope as a native of that country. It may have been transported from America; and Kolbe, who is by no means exact in his facts, may have borrowed his description from P. Zuchel, whom he quotes as having seen this animal in Brasil. That of New Spain, called *Ortobus* by Fernandez †, seems to be the same animal with the zorilla of Peru; and the *tepe-maxtla* of the same author may be the cone-pate, which ought to be found in New Spain, as well as in Louisiana and Carolina.

\* Descript. du Cap de Bonne-Espérance, par Kolbe, tom. ii. p. 86.

† *Ortobus*, magnitudine tres dodrantes vix superat, nigra candidoque vestita pilo, sed quibusdam in partibus fulvo . . . apud has gentes in cibum jamdiu venit usum, quamvis crepitus ventris sit illi foetidissimus: Occituentibus versatur agris . . . est et altera species quam tepemaxtla vocant, eadem fere forma et natura, sed nulla in parte fulva, et cauda nigris albiisque fasciis transversim discurrentibus varia, quæ provenit quoque apud Occitentes; *Fernand. Hist. An. Nov. Hisp. cap. xvi. p. 6.*

Plate CCXLVII.



COARSE.

Plate CCXLVIII.



CHINCH.





CONEPATE.



ZORILLE.