

## Canadian Natural History.

## The Fox.

(Vulpes, Cuvier.)

THE animal forming the subject of our present sketch, has been handed down to us from remote antiquity, through fable and history, as the very embodiment of all that is cunning, daring, and deceitful.

All manner of hard names have been applied to him, and at the present day, the epithet, foxy, is proverbially applied to the astute and unscrupulous knave. Although the animal is unquestionably voracious, thieving and destructive it is well to remember that he lives as he was intended to live, and simply obeys the laws of his existence. Impelled by hunger, he must eat or die. Unrestrained by the operation of any moral law, he has a perfect right to any thing that comes in his way. If he steals out at nightfall to provide for the family left behind in his burrow, he is probably not unconscious that his footsteps are waylaid by steel traps, and that possibly the hounds will be on his track in the morning. Still he braves the dangers, and snatching the food from the jaws of death, hastens home to share the repast in the family circle. It is well said by a great and good man of our times—There is something holy, in and full, and touching in what we are as we are, and to call the cunning, thieving, and reprobate Fox, risking his life and forgetting his appetite, for the sake of God has given him."

The Fox belongs to the what is called the Vulpine division of the family canidae. He is distinguished from the dog and wolf by his lower stature, pointed muzzle, shorter neck, slender limbs, and long bushy tail. Near the base of the caudal appendage, nature has placed a gland, from which a strong and unpleasant odour is diffused. The scent thus evolved pertinaciously clings to every object with which it comes in contact. Poor Reynard thus leaves an unfortunate record of his progress behind him. The consequence is, that his enduring qualities and cunning often are put severely to the test, as he scuds away—the wind on his cheek—before the crack of the hunting whip and the indescribable howling roar in which huntsmen indulge, ring a prospective death-knell to his startled ear. Adroitly he doubles, and dodges, and leaps to throw his pursuers off "the scent." His spirit and resolution are unailing, as with accelerated speed he bounds on to reach some well known place of safety.

When on a foraging expedition he is particularly dexterous in securing his prey. Weather permitting, he leaves his burrow about eleven o'clock at night, and pays a visit of no friendly character, to the neighbouring farm-yards, hen-roosts, and other outbuildings. If, as is sometimes the case, his prey be perched beyond his reach, he resorts to stratagem. As an instance of his cunning take the following from the *London Sporting Magazine*—"A neighbour of ours," says the writer, "had a large number of

At other times, the Fox follows the steps of small animals, and pounces upon the hare in her form, and birds on their nests. He is partial to fruit, especially grapes—a weakness of Reynard's, by the way, which Aesop has seized, on which to hang one of his incomparable fables and its lesson. The animal is so cunning that he is very rarely taken in any kind of trap. When he becomes unbearably destructive in any neighbourhood, the favourite method of destroying him is by the employment of strychnine, which is now

familiarly used for this purpose even by remote Indian tribes. The Fox breeds once a year, and brings forth from four to eight at a birth. There are upwards of fourteen well ascertained species of this animal of which six are found in North America.

The COMMON AMERICAN Red Fox (*Vulpes fulvus* Desm.) shown in our first illustration, has long silky fur, with a full bushy tail tipped with white. The colour is reddish yellow, grizzled with gray on the lower back.

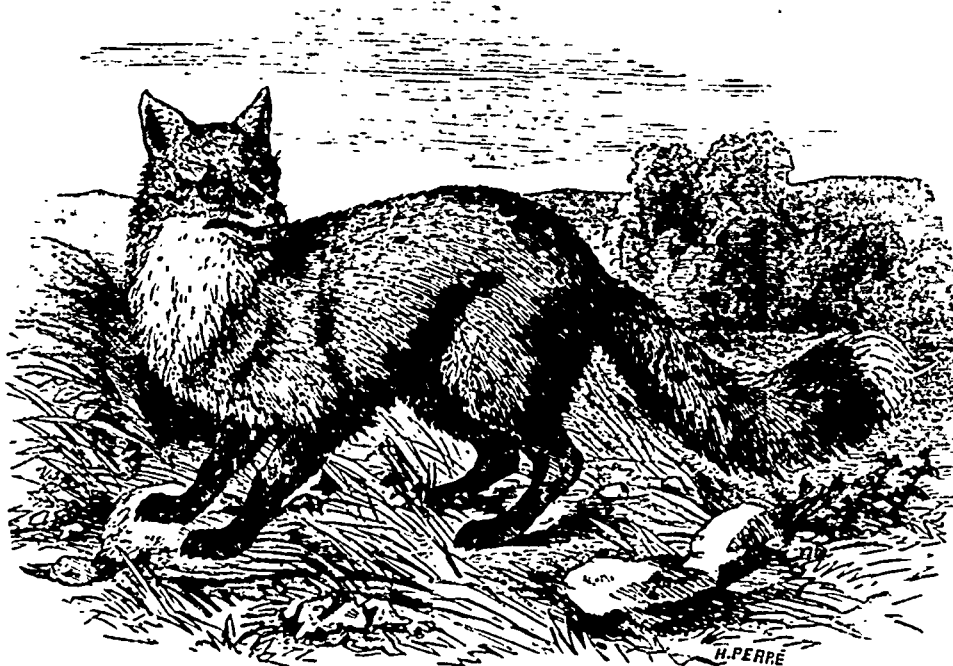
The ARCTIC Fox shown in our last wood-cut is principally confined to the more northern regions of this continent. It is smaller than the Red Fox, "with a very full and bushy tail, the soles of the feet thickly furred; in

the adult, the colour is white, in the young grayish leaden."

AGE OF ANIMALS.—A bear rarely exceeds twenty years. A dog lives twenty years; a wolf twenty; a fox fourteen or sixteen years. Lions are long lived. One has been known to live to the age of seventy years. A squirrel or hare seven or eight years; rabbits seven. Elephants have been known to live to the great age of four hundred years. When Alexander the great had conquered Phoris, King of India, he

took a great elephant which had fought valiantly for the king, and named him Ajax, dedicated him to the sun, and let him go, after placing upon him this inscription: "Alexander, the son of Jupiter, hath dedicated Ajax to the sun." This elephant was found with this inscription three hundred and fifty years afterwards. Pigs have been known to live to the age of thirty years; the rhinoceros to twenty. A horse has been known to live to the age of sixty-two, but averages from twenty to thirty. Camels sometimes live to the age of one hundred. Stags are long lived. Sheep seldom exceed the age of ten. Cows from fifteen to twenty. Cuvier considers it probable that whales sometimes live one thousand years. A swan

has attained the age of two hundred years. Pelicans are long lived. A tortoise has been known to live to the age of one hundred and seven. Insects, as a general rule, are short lived.



fine turkeys, which usually roosted in the branches of some tall firs adjoining the farm-yard. They were beyond his reach, and he accordingly was observed to resort to the following artifice. He scratched the ground beneath the tree with his fore-feet, and then the base of the tree itself, in order to draw their attention, at the same time looking up to mark every movement. He then ran round the tree in rapid rings. The turkeys, aware of their danger, followed his quick movements with their eyes, and

became confused and dizzy. One bird fell plump upon the ground and was instantly killed. The like scheme was repeated, and down came another, which shared the same fate. Both were borne off to the earths."