

of the tail; the head and nose are broad and flat; the mouth bears some similitude to that of a fish; the neck is short and equal in thickness to the head; the body long; the tail broad at the insertion; but tapering off to a point at the end; the eyes are very small, and placed nearer the nose than usual in quadrupeds. The legs are very short, but remarkably strong, broad, and muscular. The joints are articulated so loosely, that the animal is capable of turning them quite back, and bringing them on a line with the body, so as to perform the office of fins. Each foot is furnished with five toes, connected by strong broad webs like those of water-fowl. Thus Nature, in every part, has had attention to the life of an animal whose food is fish, and whose haunts must necessarily be about water. The Otter has two different modes of fishing; the one by catching its prey from the bottom upward, the other by pursuing it into some little creek, and seizing it there. In the former case, as this animal has longer lungs than most other quadrupeds, upon taking in a quantity of air, it can remain for some minutes at the bottom; and whatever fish passes over at that time, is certainly taken; for, as the eyes of the fish are placed so as not to see under them, the otter attacks them off their guard from below; and seizing them at once by the belly, drags them off shore, where it often leaves them untouched, to continue the pursuit for hours together. The other method is chiefly practised in lakes and ponds, where there is no current; the fish thus taken are rather of a smaller kind, for the great ones will never be driven out of deep water. In this manner the otter usually lives during the summer, being furnished by a supply much greater than its consumption; killing for its amusement, and infecting the edges of the lake with quantities of dead fish, which it leaves there as trophies rather of its victory than its necessities. But in winter, when the lakes are frozen over, and the rivers pour with a rapid torrent, the otter is often greatly distressed for provisions; and is then obliged to live upon grass, weeds, and even the bark of trees. It then comes upon land, and, grown courageous from necessity feeds upon terrestrial animals, rats, insects, and even sheep themselves. Nature, however, has given it the power of continuing a long time without food;—and, although during that season it is not rendered quite torpid; yet it keeps much more within its retreat, which is usually the hollow of a bank worn under by the water. There it often forms a kind of gallery, running for several yards along the edge of the water; so that when attacked at one end, it flies to the other, and often evades the fowler by plunging into the water at forty or fifty paces distance, while he expects to find it just before him.