



SHREW.

which the stream widens out half a mile higher up, and which is the peaceful home of water-fowl many and various. They are fed here, regularly, by the people who live at the mill. So they do not depart for the seaside in autumn, after the manner of coots in general, but stay on through the winter; establishing a new tradition among coots, which in course of long ages, perhaps, will develop into an instinct. They are happy little birds, and seem to enjoy life. One can see them ducking and diving merrily away, at any time from dawn till dusk. And they are very conversational. They are continually calling to one another, no doubt about matters of great importance—the abundance or dearth of water-snails, the rapid growth of the weeds, and the disgracefully muddy condition of the water when my dog happens to be engaged in his aquatic gambols up above. And one can hear their voices—if the wind should be in the right direction—from nearly a quarter of a mile away.

There are dabchicks, too, now and then. I saw my last some months ago. I was walking along the banks of a stream with a net—not for the purpose of catching the trout—and I came to a little patch of weeds, which looked as if they might harbour some beetles. So I sent in the net, and was in-

stantaneously startled by a great splashing, and the apparition of a black, winged creature just beneath me which rose up out of the water, and dashed away at a great pace down stream. Then I knew that it was a dabchick, which had seen me coming, had dived beneath the surface, and was holding on to some submerged weed until I should have passed by. The appearance of the net within an inch or two

of its beak it had not allowed for at all; and in its sudden alarm it lost its presence of mind, and trusted for once in a way to its powers of flight.

Of shrews there are plenty, although one does not often see them. They are shy little creatures, and do not like to be watched; so one has to sit silent and motionless for a few minutes, till their alarm at one's coming has passed away. They look pretty in the water, swimming, as they do readily enough, beneath the surface, with hundreds of silvery air bubbles entangled in their fur. Not so the water rat, which is a presentable rodent upon dry land, but looks, when in the water, like nothing so much as an over-grown sausage, which has split, as sausages sometimes will in the course of frying. He is clever enough to make a second entrance to his burrow beneath the water's edge, so that, when once he dives in, you see him no more.



WATER RAT.