



THE PATAGONIAN CAVY.

THE cavies (*cavidae*) constitute a group which is one of the most distinctly marked in the order *Rodentia*. Mr. Darwin, who met with the wild animal abundantly, states it to be "exceedingly common in the neighbourhood of the several towns which stand on the banks of the Rio Plata. It frequents different kinds of stations, such as hedge-rows made of the agave and opuntia, or sand hillocks; and again marshy places covered with aquatic plants, the latter appearing to be its favourite haunt. Where the soil is dry it makes a burrow, but where otherwise it lives concealed amidst the herbage. These animals generally come out to feed in the evening, and are then tame; but if the day be gloomy they make their appearance in the morning. They are said to be very injurious to young trees. An old male killed at Maldonado weighed 1 lb. 3 ozs."

Mr. Darwin observed that in this animal the attachment of the fur to the skin is very slight. Possessing but little intelligence and very timid, the guinea-pig is nevertheless tamed without any difficulty. Azara, who kept one, remarks, that though he took no pains to make it familiar, it manifested no fear when in his presence, and seemed quite unconcerned. It is to this ease with which the wild animal becomes domesticated that we owe the introduction of it into Europe, for, excepting that it is a very pretty creature, there is nothing to render it a valuable acquisition. It is, however, eaten by the native tribes of Paraguay, who sometimes capture it by hundreds when, driven from the lowlands by sudden inundations, it retreats for safety to the adjacent hilly grounds,

where it finds neither shelter nor concealment.

The Patagonian cavy, the largest of the species, is rare in European museums. Eight living specimens have been from time to time in the possession of the Zoological Society, though at the present time (August, 1881) it can only be seen in the Society's Museum. It is a beautiful animal, standing high on the legs, with much of the port of some of the bush antelopes of Africa. Its height at the shoulder is about a foot and a-half. Its length is about 2 feet 6 inches, including the tail, which is nearly two inches long. It lives on the pampas, south of Buenos Ayres, and especially in Patagonia.

It is noticed by Narborough, Wood, and Byron as being very abundant in Port Desire, and also at Port St. Julian, where, however, it does not now appear to exist. It is only where the country has a desert character that this species is common; and in the wilds of Patagonia, little groups of two, three, or four may be continually seen hopping after each other in a straight line, over plains of gravel thinly clothed with a few thorny dreary bushes and a withered herbage.

According to Azara, this cavy does not range higher north than latitude 35° ; but in this statement he appears to be mistaken, for Mr. Darwin observed, that near the coast of the Atlantic its northern limit is formed by the Sierra Tapalguen, in latitude $37^{\circ} 30'$, where the plains rather suddenly become greener and more humid; and he remarks that its limit there certainly depends on the change, since near Mendoza, $33^{\circ} 30'$, four degrees farther northward, where this country is very sterile, this animal again occurs.

Azara states that this cavy never ex-



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cavates its own burrow, but always uses that of the Viscacha, or Biscacha; and Mr. Darwin considers that where that animal is present, Azara's statement is doubtless correct, but that on the sandy plains of Bahia Blanca, where the Biscacha is not found, this cavy, as the Spaniards maintain, is its own workman. The same thing, he adds, occurs with the little owls of the pampas (*Noctua cunicularia*), which have been described by travellers as standing like sentinels at the mouths of almost every burrow; for in Banda Oriental, owing to the absence of the Biscacha, these birds are obliged to hollow out their own habitations. Azara, moreover, states that, except when pressed by danger, this cavy does not have recourse to its burrow for safety, but crouches on the plains, or trusts to its speed; adding, however, that it is soon run down.

On the contrary, Mr. Darwin asserts that at Bahia Blanca he repeatedly saw two or three animals sitting on their haunches by the mouths of their holes, which they quietly entered as he passed by at a distance. He remarks, however, that, different from most burrowing animals, they wander, commonly two or three together, to miles or even leagues from their home, and he was not able to

ascertain whether or not they returned at night.

This species is diurnal in its habits, roaming about by day. It is very shy and watchful, seldom squats after the manner of a hare, and cannot run fast, so that indifferent dogs easily overtake it. The female breeds in her burrow, generally producing two young ones at a birth. The flesh of this animal is white, but dry and insipid. The skin with the fur on is in esteem, being used for rugs, and is beautiful from the character of the hair, which is full and soft, and from the tasteful arrangement of the marking. The colour of the back is brown, grizzled with white, verging into yellow on the sides of the body and on the limbs, but becoming black as it approaches the haunch; this dark hue is there abruptly interrupted by a white band passing transversely above the root of the tail, and spreading on the back and sides of the thighs. The appearance of this white mark is very striking. The chest, inside of the limbs, and under-part of the body, are also white. The ears are three inches and a-half in length, erect and pointed. Full-grown individuals weigh between twenty and twenty-six pounds. The young, it is said, may be easily domesticated.

HAUNTS OF THE DOTTEREL.



BARELY in the morning, after having breakfasted off a delicious salmon, which Donald had caught that morning at daybreak, in the burn near the shieling, we started for the haunts of the dotterel. As we were sure to have a long and toilsome day, the good wife had amply provided each of us with a large parcel of newly-baked scones and huge slices of salmon. Donald led the way

up the steep hillside with the elastic step of a born mountaineer. I toiled after him for the first mile or two speechless and breathless, caring for nothing but to keep up with him, and listening to the throb of my overtaxed heart. The path we at first pursued had been famous in time gone by as that by which the smugglers of the district had travelled to dispose of their whisky.

When we reached the top of the first hill, we sat down to enable me to regain my breath. What a glorious stretch of