

Chapter 11 THE OTTER AND HIS NATURE

An otter is a common beast enough and therefore I need not tell of his making. She liveth with (on?) fish and dwelleth by rivers and by ponds and stanks (pools). And sometimes she feedeth on grass of the meadows and bideth gladly under the roots of trees near the rivers, and goeth to her feeding as doth other beasts to grass, but only in the new grass time, and to fish as I have said. They swimmeth in waters and rivers and sometimes diveth under the water when they will, and therefore no fish can escape them unless it be too great a one. They doth great harm specially in ponds and in stanks, for a couple of otters without more shall well destroy the fish of a great pond or great stank, and therefore men hunt them. They go in their love at the time that ferrets do, so they that hold (keep) ferrets in their houses may well know the time thereof. They bear their whelps as long as the ferrets and sometimes more and sometimes less. They whelp in holes under the trees near the rivers. Men hunt at them with

OTTER-HUNTING

(From MS. f. fr. 616, Bib. Nat., Paris)

hounds by great mastery, as I say hereafter.¹⁰¹ And also men take them at other times in rivers with small cords as men do the fox with nets and with other gins. She hath an evil biting and venomous and with her strength defendeth herself mightily from the hounds. And when she is taken with nets unless men get to her at once she rendeth them with her teeth and delivereth herself out of them. Longer will I not make mention of her, nor of her nature, for the hunting at her is the best that men may see of her, save only that she has the foot of a goose, for she hath a little skin from one claw to another, and she hath no heel save that she hath a little lump under the foot, and men speak of the steps or the marches of the otter as men speak of the trace of the hart, and his fumes (excrements) tredeles or spraints. The otter dwelleth but little in one place, for where she goeth the fish be sore afraid. Sometimes she will swim upwards and downwards seeking the fish a mile or two unless it be in a stank.

101 The author of "Master of Game" does not say anything more about the otter.

Of the remnant of his nature I refer to Milbourne¹⁰² the king's otter hunter. As of all other vermin I speak not, that is to say of martens and pole cats, for no good hunter goeth to the wood with his hounds intending to hunt for them, nor for the wild cat either. Nevertheless when men seek in covert for the fox and can find none, and the hounds happen to find them and then the hunter rejoiceth his hounds for the exploit of his hounds, and also because it is vermin that they run to. Of conies I do not speak, for no man hunteth them unless it be bish-hunters (fur hunters), and they hunt them with ferrets and with long small hayes. Those raches that run to a coney at any time ought to be rated saying to them loud, "Ware riot, ware," for no other wild beast in England is called riot save the coney only.

102 In Priv. Seal 674/6456, Feb. 18, 1410, William Melbourne is valet of our otterhounds. See Appendix: Otter.
