

Chapter 3 OF THE HART AND HIS NATURE

The hart is a common beast enough and therefore me needeth not to tell of his making, for there be few folk that have not seen some. The harts be the lightest (swiftest) beasts and strongest, and of marvellous great cunning. They are in their love, which men call rut, about the time of the Holy Rood²⁸ in September and remain in their hot love a whole month and ere they be fully out thereof they abide (in rut) nigh two months. And then they are bold, and run upon men as a wild boar would do if he were hunted. And they be wonderfully perilous beasts, for with great pain shall a man recover that is hurt by a hart, and therefore men say in old saws: "after the boar the leech and after the hart the bier." For he smiteth as the stroke of the springole,²⁹ for he has great strength in the head and the body. They slay, fight and hurt each other, when they be in rut, that is to say in their love, and they sing in their language that in England hunters call bellowing as man that loveth paramour.³⁰ They slay hounds and horses and men at that time and turn to the abbay (be at bay) as a boar does especially when they be weary. And yet have men seen at the parting of their ligging (as they start from the lair)³¹ that he hath hurt him that followeth after, and also the greyhounds³² and furthermore a courser. And yet when they are in rut, which is to say their love, in a forest where there be few hinds and many harts or male deer, they slay, hurt and fight with each other, for each would be master of the hinds. And commonly the greatest hart and the most strong holdeth the rut and is master thereof. And when he is well pured and hath been long at rut all the other harts that he hath chased and fled away (put to flight) from the rut then run upon him and slay him, and that is sooth. And in parks this may be proved, for there is never a season but the greatest hart will be slain by the others not while he is at the rut, but when he has withdrawn and is poor of love. In the woods they do not so often slay each other as they do in the plain country. And also there are divers ruts in the forest, but in the parks there are none but that are within the park. ³³ After that they be withdrawn from the hinds they go in herds and in soppes (troops) with the rascal (young lean deer) and abide in (waste) lands and in heathes more than they do in woods, for to enjoy the heat of the sun, they be poor and lean for the travail they have had with the

hinds, and for the winter, and the little meat that they find. After that they leave the rascal and gather together with two or three or four harts in soppes till the month of March when they mew (shed) their horns, and commonly some sooner than others, if they be old deer, and some later if they be young deer, or that they have had a hard winter, or that they have been hunted, or that they have been sick, for then they mew their heads and later come to good points. And when they have mewed their heads they take to the strong (thick) bushes as privily as they may, till their heads be grown again, and they come into grease; after that they seek good country for meating (feeding) of corn, of apples, of vines, of tender growing trees, of peas, of beans, and other fruits and grasses whereby they live. And sometimes a great hart hath another fellow that is called his squire, for he is with him and doth as he will. And so they will abide all that season if they be not hindered until the last end of August. And then they begin to look, and to think and to bolne and to bellow and to stir from the haunt in which they have (been) all the season, for to go seek the hinds. They recover their horns and are summed of their tines as many as they shall have all the year between March when they mewed them to the middle of June; and then be they recovered of their new hair that men call polished and their horns be recovered with a soft hair that hunters call velvet at the beginning, and under that skin and that hair the horn waxes hard and sharp, and about Mary Magdalene day (July 22) they fray their horns against the trees, and have (rubbed) away that skin from their horns and then wax they hard and strong, and then they go to burnish and make them sharp in the colliers places (charcoal pits) that men make sometimes in the great groves. And if they can find none they go against the comers of rocks or to crabbe tree or to hawthorn or other trees.³⁴

They be half in grease or thereabouts by the middle of June when their head is summed, and they be highest in grease during all August. Commonly they be calved in May, and the hind beareth her calf nine months or thereabout as a sow,³⁵ and sometimes she has three³⁶ calves at a calving time. And I say not that they do not calve sometime sooner and sometime later, much according to causes and reasons. The calves are calved with hair red and white, which lasteth them that colour into the end of August, and then they turn red of hair, as the hart and the hind. And at that time they run so fast that a hare³⁷ should have enough to do to overtake him within the shot of an haronblast (cross-bow). Many men judge the deer of many colours of hair and especially of three colours. Some be called brown, some dun and some yellow haired. And also their heads be of divers manners, the one is called a head well-grown, and the other is called well affeted,³⁸ and well affeted is when

the head has waxed by ordinance according to the neck and shape, when the tines be well grown in the beam by good measure, one near the other, then it is called well affeted. Well grown is when the head is of great beam and is well affeted and thick tined, well high and well opened (spread). That other head is called counterfeit (abnormal) when it is different and is otherwise turned behind or wayward in other manner than other common deer be accustomed to bear. That other high head is open, evil affeted with long tines and few. That other is low and great and well affeted with small tines. And the first tine that is next the head is called antler, and the second Royal and the third above, the Sur-royal, and the tines³⁹ which be called fourth if they be two, and if they be three or four or more be called troching. And when their heads be burnished at the colliers' pits commonly they be always black, and also commonly when they be burnished at the colliers' pits they be black on account of the earth which is black of its kind. And when they are burnished against rock they abide all white, but some have their heads naturally white and some black. And when they be about to burnish they smite the ground with their feet and welter like a horse. And then they burnish their heads, and when they be burnished which they do all the month of July they abide in that manner till the feast of the Holy (Cross) in September 14th and then they go to rut as I have said.

28 September 14. See Appendix: Hart, Seasons.

29 An engine of war used for throwing stones.

30 G. de F., p. 12. "Ainsi que fet un homme bien amoureux" ("As does a man much in love)."

31 This word *ligging* is still in use in Yorkshire, meaning lair, or bed, or resting-place. In Devonshire it is spelt "layer." Fortescue, p. 132.

32 G. de F., p. 12, has "limer" instead of "greyhound."

33 This passage is confused. In G. de F., p. 12, we find that the passage runs: "Et aussi il y a ruyt en divers lieux de la forest et on paix ne peut estre en nul lieu, fors que dedans le part." Lavallée translates these last five words, "C'est à dire qu'il n'y a de paix que lorsque les biches sont pleines." In the exceedingly faulty first edition by Verard, the word "part" is printed "parc," as it is in our MS.

34 G. de F., p. 14, says the harts go to gravel-pits and bogs to fray.

35 The MS. transcriber's mistake. It should be "cow."

36 G. de F. has "2 calves" as it should be.

37 G. de F. has "greyhound," as it should be (p. 15): "Et dès lors vont ils ja si tost que un levrier a assés à fere de l'ateindre, ainsi comme un trait d'arcbaleste" ("And from that time they go so quickly that a greyhound has as much to do to catch him as he would the bolt from a crossbow)."

38 Well proportioned. See Appendix: Antler.

39 Shirley MS. has the addition here: "Which be on top."

And the first year that they be calved they be called a Calf, the second year a bullock; and that year they go forth to rut; the third year a brocket; the fourth year a staggard, the fifth a stag; the sixth year a hart of ten⁴⁰ and then first is he chaseable, for always before shall he be called but rascal or folly. Then it is fair to hunt the hart, for it is a fair thing to seek well a hart, and a fair thing well to harbour him, and a fair thing to move him, and a fair thing to hunt him, and a fair thing to retrieve him, and a fair thing to be at the abbay, whether it be on water or on land. A fair thing is the curée,⁴¹ and a fair thing to undo him well, and for to raise the rights. And a well fair thing and good is the devision⁴² it be a good deer. In so much that considering all things I hold that it is the fairest hunting, that any man may hunt after. They crotey their fumes (cast their excrements) in divers manners according to the time and season and according to the pasture that they find, now black or dry either in flat forms or englymed (glutinous) or pressed, and in many other divers manners the which I shall more plainly devise when I shall declare how the hunter shall judge, for sometimes they misjudge by the fumes and so they do by the foot. When they crotey their fumes flat and not thick, it is in April or in May, into the middle of June, when they have fed on tender corn, for yet their fumes be not formed, and also they have not recovered their grease. But yet have men seen sometimes a great deer and an old and high in grease, which about mid-season crotey their fumes black and dry. And therefore by this and many other things many men may be beguiled by deer, for some goeth better and are better running and fly better than some, as other beasts do, and some be more cunning and more wily than others, as it is with men, for some be wiser than others. And it cometh to them of the good kind of their father and mother, and of good getting (breeding) and of good nurture and from being born in good constellations, and in good signs of heaven, and that (is the case) with men and all other beasts. Men take them with hounds, with greyhounds and with nets and

with cords, and with other harness,⁴³ with pits and with shot⁴⁴ and with other gins (traps) and with strength, as I shall say hereafter. But in England they are not slain except with hounds or with shot or with strength of running hounds.

40 In modern sporting terms, a warrantable deer.

41 See Appendix: Curée.

42 Should be: venison.

43 Harness, appurtenances. See Appendix: Harness.

44 Means from a cross-bow or long-bow.

An old deer is wonder wise and felle (cunning) for to save his life, and to keep his advantage when he is hunted and is uncoupled to, as the lymer moveth him or other hounds findeth him without lymers, and if he have a deer (with him) that be his fellow he leaveth him to the hounds, so that he may warrant (save) himself, and let the hounds enchase after that other deer. And he will abide still, and if he be alone and the hounds find him, he shall go about his haunt willyly and wisely and seek the change of other deer, for to make the hounds envoie,⁴⁵ and to look where he may abide. And if he cannot abide he taketh leave of his haunt and beginneth to fly there where he wots of other change and then when he has come thither he herdeth among them and sometimes he goeth away with them. And then he maketh a ruse on some side, and there he stalleth or squatteth until the hounds be forth after the other (deer) the which be fresh, and thus he changeth so that he may abide. And if there be any wise hounds, the which can bodily enchase him from the change, and he seeth that all can not avail, then he beginneth to show his wiles and ruseth to and fro. And all this he doth so that the hounds should not find his fues (tracks) in intent that he may be freed from them and that he may save himself.

45 Go off the scent.

Sometimes he fleeth forth with the wind and that for three causes, for when he fleeth against the wind it runneth into his mouth and dryeth him and doth him great harm. Therefore he fleeth oft forth with the wind so that he may always hear the hounds come after him. And also that the hounds should not scent nor find him, for his tail is in the wind and not his nose.⁴⁶ Also, that when the hounds be nigh him he may wind them and

hye him well from them. But nevertheless his nature is for the most part to flee ever on the wind till he be nigh overcome, or at the last sideways to the wind so that it be aye (ever) in his nostrils. And when he shall hear that they be far from him, he hieth him not too fast. And when he is weary, and hot, then he goeth to yield, and soileth to some great river. And some time he foils down in the water half a mile or more ere he comes to land on any side. And that he doeth for two reasons, the one is to make himself cold, and for to refresh himself of the great heat that he hath, the other is that the hounds and the hunter may not come after him nor see his fues in the water, as they do on the land. And if in the country (there) is no great river he goeth then to the little (one) and shall beat up the water or foil down the water as he liketh best for the maintenance (extent) of a mile or more ere he come to land, and he shall keep himself from touching any of the brinks or branches but always (keep) in the middle of the water, so that the hounds should not scent of him. And all that doth he for two reasons before said.

46 This should read as G. de F. has it (p. 20): "Et aussi affin que les chiens ne puissent bien assentir de luy, quar ilz auront la Cueue au vent et non pas le nez" ("And also that the hounds shall not be able to wind him, as they will have their tails in the wind and not their noses").

And when he can find no rivers then he draweth to great stanks⁴⁷ and meres or to great marshes. And he fleeth then mightily and far from the hounds, that is to say that he hath gone a great way from them,⁴⁸ then he will go into the stank, and will soil therein once or twice in all the stank and then he will come out again by the same way that he went in, and then he shall ruse again the same way that he came (the length of) a bow shot or more, and then he shall ruse out of the way, for to stall or squat to rest him, and that he doeth for he knoweth well that the hounds shall come by the fues into the stank where he was. And when they should find that he has gone no further they will seek him no further, for they will well know that they have been there at other times.

47 Ponds, pools. See Appendix: Stankes.

48 G. de F., p. 21: "Et s'il fuit de fort longe aux chiens, c'est à dire que il les ait bien esloinhés." See Appendix: "Forlonge."

An hart liveth longest of any beast for he may well live an hundred years⁴⁹ and the older he is the fairer he is of body and of head, and more lecherous, but he is not so swift, nor so light, nor so mighty. And many men say, but I make no affirmation upon that, when he is right old he

beateth a serpent with his foot till she be wrath, and then he eateth her and then goeth to drink, and then runneth hither and thither to the water till the venom be mingled together and make him cast all his evil humours that he had in his body, and maketh his flesh come all new.⁵⁰ The head of the hart beareth medicine against the hardness of the sinews and is good to take away all aches, especially when these come from cold: and so is the marrow. They have a bone within the heart which hath great medicine, for it comforteth the heart, and helpeth for the cardiac, and many other things which were too long to write, the which bear medicine and be profitable in many diverse manners. The hart is more wise in two things than is any man or other beast, the one is in tasting of herbs, for he hath better taste and better savour and smelleth the good herbs and leaves and other pastures and meating the which be profitable to him, better than any man or beast. The other is that he hath more wit and malice (cunning) to save himself than any other beast or man, for there is not such a good hunter in the world that can think of the great malice and gynnes (tricks or ruses) that a hart can do, and there is no such good hunter nor such good hounds, but that many times fail to slay the hart, and that is by his wit and his malice and by his gins.

49 Most old writers on the natural history of deer repeat this fable. See Appendix: Hart.

50 See Appendix: Hart.

As of the hinds some be barren and some bear calves, of those that be barren their season beginneth when the season of the hart faileth and lasteth till Lent. And they which bear calves, in the morning when she shall go to her lair she will not remain with her calf, but she will hold (keep) him and leave him a great way from her, and smiteth him with the foot and maketh him to lie down, and there the calf shall remain always while the hind goeth to feed. And then she shall call her calf in her language and he shall come to her. And that she doeth so that if she were hunted her calf might be saved and that he should not be found near her. The harts have more power to run well from the entry of May into St. John's tide⁵¹ than any other time, for then they have put on new flesh and new hair and new heads, for the new herbs and the new coming out (shoots) of trees and of fruits and be not too heavy, for as yet they have not recovered their grease,⁵² neither within nor without, nor their heads, wherefore they be much lighter and swifter. But from St. John's into the month of August they wax always more heavy. Their skin is right good for to do many things with when it is well tawed and taken in good season. Harts that be in great hills, when it cometh to rut, sometimes

they come down into the great forests and heaths and to the launds (uncultivated country) and there they abide all the winter until the entering of April, and then they take to their haunts for to let their heads wax, near the towns and villages in the plains there where they find good feeding in the new growing lands. And when the grass is high and well waxen they withdraw into the greatest hills that they can find for the fair pastures and feeding and fair herbs that be thereupon. And also because there be no flies nor any other vermin, as there be in the plain country. And also so doth the cattle which come down from the hills in winter time, and in the summer time draw to the hills. And all the time from rutting time into Whitsunday great deer and old will be found in the plains, but from Whitsunday⁵³ to rutting time men shall find but few great deer save upon the hills, if there are any (hills) near or within four or five miles, and this is truth unless it be some young deer calved in the plains, but of those that come from the hills there will be none. And every day in the heat of the day, and he be not hindered, from May to September, he goes to soil though he be not hunted.

51 Nativity of St. John the Baptist, June 24.

52 See Appendix: Grease.

53 This sentence reads somewhat confusedly in our MS., so I have taken this rendering straight from G. de F., p. 23.
