

Chapter 5 OF THE ROE AND OF HIS NATURE

The roebuck is a common beast enough, and therefore I need not to tell of his making, for there be few men that have not seen some of them. It is a good little beast and goodly for to hunt to whoso can do it as I shall devise hereafter, for there be few hunters that can well devise his nature. They go in their love that is called bokeyng in October,⁵⁶ and the bucking of them lasteth but fifteen days or there about. At the bucking of the roebuck he hath to do but with one female for all the season, and a male and a female abide together as the hinds⁵⁷ till the time that the female shall have her kids; and then the female parteth from the male and goeth to kid her kids far from thence, for the male would slay the young if he could find them. And when they be big that they can eat by themselves of the herbs and of the leaves and can run away, then the female cometh again to the male, and they shall ever be together unless they be slain, and if one hunt them and part them asunder one from another, they will come together again as soon as they can and will seek each other until the time that one of them have found the other. And the cause why the male and the female be evermore together as no otherst in this world, is that commonly the female hath two kids at once, one male and the other female, and because they are kidded together they hold evermore together. And yet if they were not kidded together of one female, yet is the nature of them such that they will always hold together as I have said before. When they withdraw from the bucking, they mew their heads, for men will find but few roebucks that have passed two years that have not mewed their heads by All Hallowtide. And after the heads come again rough as a hart's head, and commonly they burnish their horns in March. The roebuck hath no season to be hunted, for they bear no venison⁵⁸ but men should leave them the females for their kids that would be lost unto the time that they have kidded, and that the kids can feed themselves and live by themselves without their dame. It is good hunting for it lasteth all the year and they run well, and longer than does a great hart in higason time. Roebucks cannot be judged by their fumes, and but little by their track as one can of harts, for a man cannot know the male from the female by her feet or by her fumes.

56 This is wrong; they rut in the beginning of August. See Appendix: Roe.

57 A clerical error. G. de F. (p. 36) says, "as do birds," which makes good sense.

58 See Appendix: Grease.

They have not a great tail and do not gather venison as I have said, the greatest grease that they may have within is when the kidneys be covered all white. When the hounds hunt after the roebuck they turn again into their haunts and sometimes turn again to the hounds⁵⁹. When they see that they cannot dure⁶⁰ (last) they leave the country and run right long ere they be dead. And they run in and out a long time and beat the brooks in the same way a hart doth. And if the roebuck were as fair a beast as the hart, I hold that it were a fairer hunting than that of the hart, for it lasteth all the year and is good hunting and requires great mastery, for they run right long and gynnously (cunningly). Although they mew their heads they do not reburnish them, nor repair their hair till new grass time. It is a diverse (peculiar) beast, for it doth nothing after the nature of any other beast, and he followeth men into their houses, for when he is hunted and overcome he knoweth never where he goeth. The flesh of the roebuck is the most wholesome to eat of any other wild beast's flesh, they live on good herbs and other woods and vines and on briars and hawthorns⁶¹ with leaves and on all growth of young trees. When the female has her kids she does all in the manner as I have said of a hind. When they be in bucking they sing a right foul song, for it seemeth as if they were bitten by hounds. When they run at their ease they run ever with leaps, but when they be weary or followed by hounds they run naturally and sometimes they trot or go apace, and sometimes they hasten and do not leap, and then men say that the roebuck hath lost his leaps, and they say amiss, for he ever leaves off leaping when he is well hasted and also when he is weary.

59 "They ring about in their own country, and often bound back to the hounds" would be a better translation.

60 From the French durer, to last.

61 G. de F. says "acorns."

When he runneth at the beginning, as I have said, he runneth with leaps and with rugged standing hair and the eres⁶² (target) and the tail cropping up all white.

62 Middle English ars, hinder parts called target of roebuck.

And when he hath run long his hair lyeth sleek down, not standing nor rugged and his eres (target) does not show so white.

And when he can run no longer he cometh and yieldeth himself to some small brook, and when he hath long beaten the brook upward or downward he remaineth in the water under some roots so that there is nothing out of water save his head.

ROEBUCK-HUNTING WITH GREYHOUNDS AND RUNNING HOUNDS

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

And sometimes the hounds and the hunters shall pass above him and beside him and he will not stir. For although he be a foolish beast he has many ruses and treasons to help himself. He runneth wondrous fast, for when he starts from his lair he will go faster than a brace of good greyhounds. They haunt thick coverts of wood, or thick heathes, and sometimes in carres (marshes) and commonly in high countries or in hills and valleys and sometimes in the plains.

The kids are kidded with pomeled⁶³ (spotted) hair as are the hind calves. And as a hind's calf of the first year beginneth to put out his head, in the same wise does he put out his small brokes⁶⁴ (spikes) ere he be a twelvemonth old. He is hardeled⁶⁵ but not undone as a hart, for he has no venison that men should lay in salt. And sometimes he is given all to the hounds, and sometimes only a part. They go to their feeding as other beasts do, in the morning and in the evening, and then they go to their lair. The roebuck remains commonly in the same country both winter and summer if he be not grieved or hunted out thereof.

63 From the old French pomelé.

64 See Appendix: Roe.

65 See Appendix: Hardele.

