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**Sketches Of The History Of Man**

In Two Volumes

**Home, Henry**

**Edinburgh, 1774**

Appendix, Concerning propagation of animals, and care of their offspring

**urn:nbn:de:gbv:45:1-945**

## A P P E N D I X.

*Concerning Propagation of Animals, and Care of their Offspring.*

THE natural history of animals with respect to pairing, and care of their offspring, is susceptible of more elucidation than could regularly be introduced into the sketch itself, where it makes but a single argument. Loth to neglect a subject that eminently displays the wisdom and benevolence of Providence, I gladly embrace the present opportunity, however slight, to add what further occurs upon it. Buffon, in many large volumes, bestows scarce a thought on that favourite subject; and the neglect of our countrymen Ray and Derham is still less excusable, considering that to display the conduct of Providence was their sole purpose in writing on natural history.

The instinct of pairing is bestow'd on every species of animals to which it is necessary for rearing their young; and on no other species. All wild birds pair: but with a remarkable difference between such as place their nests on trees, and such as place them on the ground. The young of the former, being hatched blind, and without feathers, require the nursing care of both parents till they be able to fly. The male feeds his mate on the nest, and cheers her with a song. As soon as the young are hatched, singing yields to a more necessary occupation, that of providing food for a numerous issue, a task that requires both parents.

Eagles and other birds of prey build on trees, or on other inaccessible spots. They not only pair, but continue in pairs all the year

year round; and the same pair procreate year after year. This at least is the case of eagles: the male and female hunt together, unless during incubation, during which time the female is fed by the male. A greater number than a single pair never are seen in company.

Gregarious birds pair, in order probably to prevent discord in a society confined to a narrow space. This is the case particularly of pigeons and rooks. The male and female sit on the eggs alternately, and divide the care of feeding their young.

Partridges, plovers, pheasants, peafowl, grouse, and other kinds that place their nests on the ground, have the instinct of pairing; but differ from such as build on trees in the following particular, that after the female is impregnated, she completes her task without needing any help from the male. Retiring from him, she chooses a safe spot for her nest, where she can find plenty of worms and grass-feed at hand. And her young, as soon as hatched, take foot, and seek food for themselves. The only remaining duty incumbent on the dam is, to lead them to proper places for food, and to call them together when danger impends. Some males, provoked at the desertion of their mates, break the eggs if they stumble on them. Eider ducks pair like other birds that place their nests on the ground; and the female finishes her nest with down plucked from her own breast. If the nest be destroy'd for the down, which is remarkably warm and elastic, she makes another nest as before. If she be robb'd a second time, she makes a third nest; but the male furnishes the down. A lady of spirit observed, that the Eider duck may give a lesson to many a married woman, who is more disposed to pluck her husband than herself. The black game never pair: in spring the cock on an eminence crows, and claps his wings; and all the females within hearing instantly resort to him.

Pairing birds, excepting those of prey, flock together in February,

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in order to chuse their mates. They soon disperse; and are not seen afterward but in pairs.

Pairing is unknown to quadrupeds that feed on grafs. To such it would be uselefs; as the female gives suck to her young while she herself is feeding. If M. Buffon deserve credit, the roe-deer are an exception. They pair, though they feed on grafs, and have but one litter in a year.

Beasts of prey, such as lions, tigers, wolves, pair not. The female is left to shift for herself and for her young; which is a laborious task, and often so unsuccessful as to shorten the life of many of them. Pairing is essential to birds of prey, because incubation leaves the female no sufficient time to hunt for food. Pairing is not necessary to beasts of prey, because their young can bear a long fast. Add another reason, that they would multiply so fast by pairing as to prove troublesome neighbours to the human race.

Among animals that pair not, males fight desperately about a female. Such a battle among horned cattle is finely described by Lucretius. Nor is it unusual for seven or eight lions to wage bloody war for a single female.

The same reason that makes pairing necessary for gregarious birds, obtains with respect to gregarious quadrupeds; those especially who store up food for winter, and during that season live in common. Discord among such would be attended with worse consequences than even among lions and bulls, who are not confined to one place. The beavers, with respect to pairing, resemble birds that place their nests on the ground. As soon as the young are produced, the males abandon their stock of food to their mates, and live at large; but return frequently to visit them while they are suckling their young.

Hedge-hogs pair as well as several of the monkey-kind. We are not well acquainted with the natural history of these animals;

mals; but it would appear that the young require the nursing care of both parents.

Seals have a singular economy. Polygamy seems to be a law of nature among them, as a male associates with several females. The sea-turtle has no occasion to pair, as the female concludes her task by laying her eggs in the sand. The young are hatched by the sun; and immediately crawl to the sea.

In every other branch of animal economy concerning the continuance of the species, the hand of Providence is equally conspicuous. The young of pairing birds are produced in the spring, when the weather begins to be comfortable; and their early production makes them firm and vigorous before winter, to endure the hardships of that rigorous season. Such early production is in particular favourable to eagles, and other birds of prey; for in the spring they have plenty of food, by the return of birds of passage.

Tho' the time of gestation varies considerably in the different quadrupeds that feed on grass, yet the female is regularly delivered early in summer, when grass is in plenty. The mare admits the stallion in summer, carries eleven months, and is delivered the beginning of May. The cow differs little. A sheep and a goat take the male in November, carry five months, and produce when grass begins to spring. These animals love short grass, upon which a mare or a cow would starve\*. The rutting-season of the red deer is the end of September, and beginning of October: it continues for three weeks, during which time the male runs from female to female without intermission. The female

\* I have it upon good authority, that ewes pasturing in a hilly country pitch early on some snug spot, where they may drop their young with safety. And hence the risk of removing a flock to a new field immediately before delivery: many lambs perish by being dropped in improper places.

brings



brings forth in May, or beginning of June; and the female of the fallow deer brings forth at the same time. The she-afs is in feafon beginning of fummer; but ſhe bears twelve months, which fixes her delivery to fummer. Wolves and foxes copulate in December: the female carries five months, and brings forth in April, when animal food is as plentiful as at any other feafon; and the ſhe-lion brings forth about the ſame time. Of this early birth there is one evident advantage, hinted above: the young have time to grow ſo firm as eaſily to bear the inclemencies of winter.

Were one to gueſs what probably would be the time of rutting, fummer would be named, eſpecially in a cold climate. And yet to quadrupeds who carry but four or five months, that economy would be pernicious, throwing the time of delivery to an improper feafon for warmth, as well as for food. Wiſely is it ordered, that the delivery ſhould conſtantly be at the beſt feafon for both.

Gregarious quadrupeds that ſtore up food for winter, differ from all other quadrupeds with reſpect to the time of delivery. Beavers copulate the end of autumn, and bring forth in January, when their granary is full. The ſame economy probably obtains among all other quadrupeds of the ſame kind.

One rule takes place among all brute animals, without a ſingle exception, That the female never is burdened with two litters at the ſame time. The time of geſtation is ſo unerringly calculated by nature, that the young brood upon hand can provide for themſelves before another brood comes on. Even a hare is not an exception, tho' many litters are produced in a year. The female carries thirty or thirty-one days; but ſhe fuckles her young only twenty days, after which they provide for themſelves, and leave her free to a new litter.

The care of animals to preſerve their young from harm is a beautiful inſtance of Providence. When a hind hears the hounds, ſhe puts herſelf in the way of being hunted, and leads them a-  
way



way from her fawn. The lapwing is no less ingenious: if a person approach, she flies about, retiring always from her nest. A partridge is extremely artful: she hops away, hanging a wing as if broken: lingers till the person approach, and hops again. A hen, timid by nature, is bold as a lion in defence of her young: she darts upon every creature that threatens danger. The roe-buck defends its young with resolution and courage. So doth a ram; and so do many other quadrupeds.

It is observed by an ingenious writer (a), that nature sports in the colour of domestic animals, in order that men may the more readily distinguish their own. It is not easy to say, why colour is more varied in such animals, than in those which remain in the state of nature: I can only say, that the cause assigned is not satisfactory. One is seldom at a loss to distinguish one animal from another; and Providence never interposes to vary the ordinary course of nature, for an end so little necessary as to make the distinction still more obvious. Such interposition would beside have a bad effect, by encouraging inattention and indolence.

The foregoing particulars are offered to the public as hints merely: may it not be hoped, that they will excite curiosity in those who relish natural history? The field is rich, tho' little cultivated; and I know no other branch of natural history that opens finer views into the conduct of Providence.

(a) Pennant.

