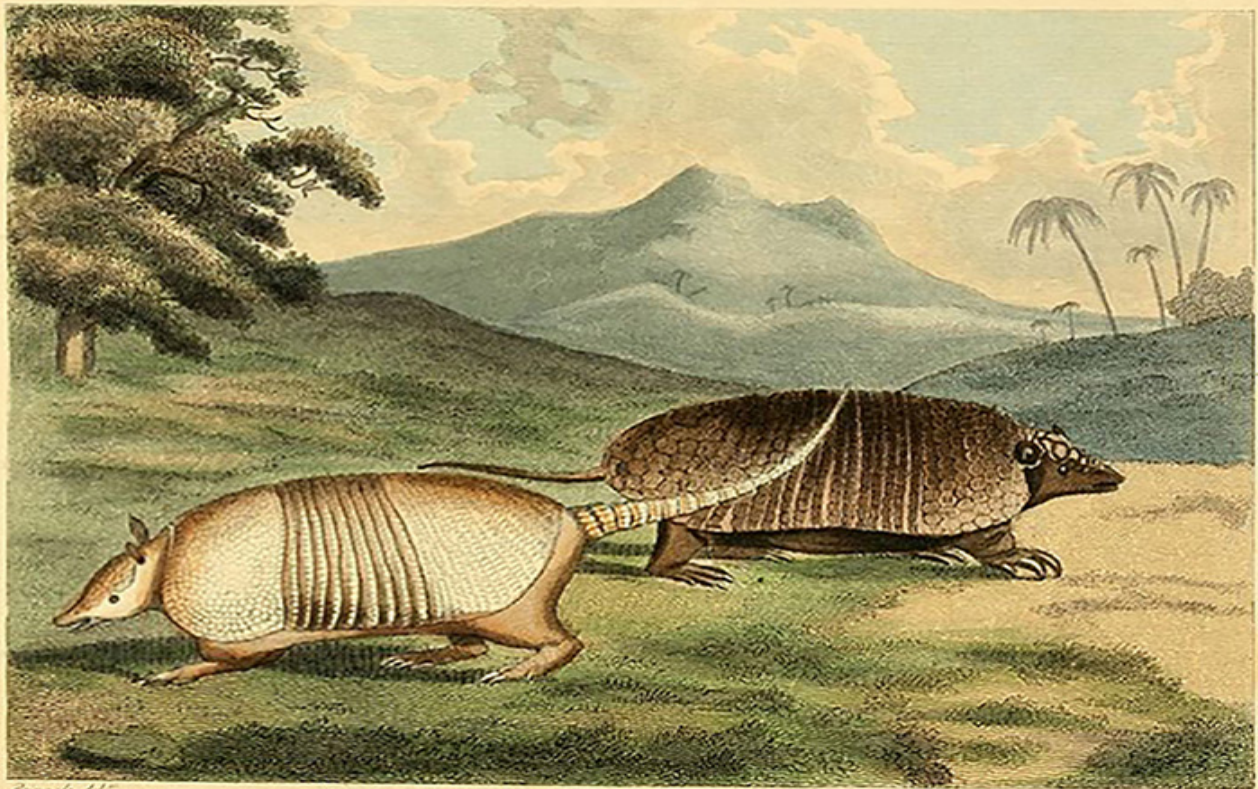


The STORE-HOUSE of WONDER and ASTONISHMENT



Arm. 9 b.
DASYPUS 9 CINCTUS. THE 9 BANDED ARMADILLO. DASYPUS 12 CINCTUS. THE 12 BANDED ARMADILLO. *Shelton sculp.*

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Sherry Rind

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Acknowledgments

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Elephants, Their Capacity

The elephant is the largest of them all, and in intelligence approaches the nearest to man. Pliny the Elder, 77 CE

We speak to the lines of sound
among planets, thin as spiders' silk,
when the new moon reveals itself
after the darkest night.

Silver to silver
we send up the water
and return to the forest.
Thus, we mark the years
of ascending and descending on earth.

When one of us falls,
we inhale her scent to keep it
with all the other stories;
the follower is not less than the leader.

When you take one of us
she will learn your language and obey
because she is no longer herself
but a dog whose world is work.
Because you fear our size
you diminish us.

Because you cannot hear
you do not know how the earth talks to itself.
You will never speak our language
which is of the earth
the deepest tides of underground streams
the molten shiftings you cannot hear.

Aristotle On the Disappearance of Birds

...these habits are modified so as to suit cold and heat and the variations of the seasons. Aristotle's History of Animals, 350 BCE

We account for the absence of certain birds in winter through observation and travelers' reports. I have seen cranes flying south in the fall, their bodies the size of kites in the great distance above us, their horn-like call a musical reminder of our diminishing season. As wealthy men spend summer in cool places and winter in sunny ones, cranes summer by the Black Sea and winter in Nile marshes where they defend their eggs in battle with goat-riding Pygmies whose spears match in length the cranes' pointed beaks. They drench the land in gore with a ferocity Homer likened to a Trojan battle.

Our redstarts of summer disappear in winter when robins are seen. Note the similarity in size and coloring: the redstart's orange belly and undertail, the slate head and back as if he dons a hooded cloak; the robin's markings are muted like winter's landscape. We may assume the one transmutes into the other to live more comfortably in each season. From these birds we learn the rhythms of time and weather.

Storks, kites, and doves fall into winter torpor like their animal counterparts.

Swallows are nowhere to be found
and, like the redstarts, are too small to journey
from one land to another. Rather,
they sleep the winter through, hidden
in hollow trees or submerged in marsh-mud,
as men seek shelter in houses in winter.
Although fishermen may dredge hibernating swallows
from the depths, the birds soon die
if awakened before their time.

Left to natural desire in spring,
their beaks forge up through the silt
which flows off the birds
as they float to the surface
and leap joyfully
into the sky where they dip and dart
in the exuberance of spirits that all animals
display when once again sun warms the blood
and the season of growth stirs all creatures
to their natural cycles.
Only we who observe them
count the years to their inevitable end.

A Bed Among Goats

You will have a warmer bed in amongst the goats than among the sheep.

Aristotle

We press up during sleep, all dreaming
of new leaves. The kids' legs twitch in play.
Against the cold and the roaming panther
we need each other and the shepherd
sharing our warmth.
We bring cheer to horses,

who grow anxious about all they do not recognize;
a fallen branch is a snake,
a blown rag at the edge of vision,
the paw of a wolf. Among us,
their eyes stop rolling
and they bend their long necks to the grass.

We find the wild lands
better than dreams.
We climb high on a hill, high up broken boulders,
testing our clever feet.
Although buzzards hang above,
they are flies to us.

We do not fear these untried places.
Far below, olive trees wave silver and green,
whisper with the small birds
who never settle to their thoughts.

The shepherd comes after us, muttering,
watching her feet slipping among rocks
instead of looking out
where we look,

until we take pity and go to her.
We butt her legs gently, press up
until she lets go her human fears
and we return home as one.

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