

The Indians enter the Cueva del Guacharo once a-year, near midsummer. They go armed with poles, with which they destroy the greater part of the nests. At that season several thousand birds are killed; and the old ones, as if to defend their brood, hover over the heads of the Indians, uttering terrible cries. The young,* which fall to the ground, are opened on the spot. Their peritoneum is found extremely loaded with fat, and a layer of fat reaches from the abdomen to the anus, forming a kind of cushion between the legs of the bird. This quantity of fat in frugivorous animals, not exposed to the light, and exerting very little muscular motion, reminds us of what has been observed in the fattening of geese and oxen. It is well known how greatly darkness and repose favour this process. The nocturnal birds of Europe are lean, because, instead of feeding on fruits, like the guacharo, they live on the scanty produce of their prey. At the period commonly called, at Caripe, the oil harvest,† the Indians build huts with palm-leaves, near the entrance, and even in the porch of the cavern. There, with a fire of brushwood, they melt in pots of clay the fat of the young birds just killed. This fat is known by the name of butter or oil (*manteca*, or *aceite*) of the guacharo. It is half liquid, transparent, without smell, and so pure that it may be kept above a year without becoming rancid. At the convent of Caripe no other oil is used in the kitchen of the monks but that of the cavern; and we never observed that it gave the aliments a disagreeable taste or smell.

The race of the guacharos would have been long ago extinct, had not several circumstances contributed to its preservation. The natives, restrained by their superstitious ideas, seldom have courage to penetrate far into the grotto. It appears also, that birds of the same species dwell in neighbouring caverns, which are too narrow to be accessible to man. Perhaps the great cavern is repeopled by colonies which forsake the small grottoes; for the missionaries assured us, that hitherto no sensible diminution of the birds have been observed. Young guacharos have been sent to the port of Cumana, and have lived there several days without taking any nourishment, the seeds offered to them

* Called *Los pollos del Guacharo*.

† *La cosecha de la manteca*.