

First Encounters



The
Grandeur
of
Life



For naturalists, one of the most startling results of the Renaissance voyages of exploration was the discovery of dozens of animals unknown to ancient authorities like Aristotle and Pliny. Columbus and subsequent explorers brought back tales of armored pigs (armadillos), baby-faced bears (sloths), and foxes with pouches (opossums). Sometimes they returned with specimens or skins, sometimes they just provided verbal descriptions. So the first images published of New World animals vary widely in accuracy. The guinea pig and armadillo are quite recognizable; the sloth and opossum need considerable explication.



Top Left: Guinea pig, from Konrad Gesner, Thierbuch, 1563.

Top Right: Sloth, from Konrad Gesner, Thierbuch, 1563.

Above: Armadillo, from Konrad Gesner, Thierbuch, 1563.

Below Left: Opossum, from Konrad Gesner, Thierbuch, 1563.

