

**THE WILDLIFE CAN GET UNDERFOOT WHEN ONE WANDERS
THE WOODS
05/16/00**

After supper one evening last week, a brief try for a breakfast trout left me with a memorable experience. No, it wasn't catching a trophy fish, but something far different.

The Middle Branch of the Moose River runs by my front door and annually yields up a handful of nice brook trout this time of year. I was in my canoe floating down river 10 feet or so from the steep bank on my right. A sudden rush in the dry leaves and brush caused me to turn instinctively just in time to see a very large beaver plunge into the water and go directly under my canoe. It rocked noticeably as he tore under it, putting distance between us. I believe I was as surprised as he was.

It has made me recall other startling incidents with wildlife over the years.

Another beaver, years ago, caused an even bigger stir to my reverie. I was trapping beaver on a large open stream and noticed what I thought might be a bank den entrance below water. I waded over and was probing the hole with my foot when the proof of its authenticity tore out between my legs. Believe me, when you are standing knee deep in cold water and a 40-pound-plus animal unexpectedly explodes out between your legs, it gives you quite a start.

A large angry fisher provided me with an even greater surprise. I had placed a beaver carcass in the base of a huge hollow birch to see what flesh-eating furbearers I could attract. It was not far from the road and I was able to check it daily for action.

Walking over one day as I bent down to peer in the opening, I nearly fell over backwards as a growling, large fisher flew out practically in my face. In an instant he scrambled up a nearby six-inch spruce, turned and snarled menacingly about 15 feet over my head. Just as quickly, he leapt away and dashed off into the woods.

The pounding rain today (5/10/00) reminded me of the time a trophy buck made me do a double take. I was charging along in a deafening downpour, facedown, deer hunting with deer being the furthest thing from my mind. Suddenly this large antlered buck scrambles to his feet, under my feet, and tears away. I threw a hasty futile shot his way, but to no avail.

I cannot recall how many times small spotted fawns and varying hares have caused me to practically jump out of my skin. When the ferns, witchhobble and other underbrush hide the little devils its easy to walk right up and nearly step on them. It's hard not to do a little side step

when it happens to you.

In every episode related to this point the participants were relieved on both sides to make their getaways. This was not necessarily so in the case of some other wildlife encounters I have had.

Partridge, interestingly enough, provided me with the most bizarre. Everyone who has spent any time at all in the woods knows the routine of mother partridge and other birds who feign an injury to lure intruders away from their nests or young.

I have had two who actually had the audacity to attack my person. One was a female with young, the other a male in spring breeding season. The male was defending his territory and initiated the contact. After I entered my vehicle he flew up on the hood and tried to get at me through the windshield. You can ask Gregg VanSlyke about this bird if you doubt my word.

A goshawk will vigorously defend her nest and territory and the intruder is the party who will show the most surprise and concern, as I learned on one occasion.

The biggest surprise I ever had was on the shore of Gibbs Lake in the 60s. I was hopping from rock to rock traversing the shore. They were partially obscured with tall bracken fern and one had to proceed very carefully. When I was in mid-stride between two rocks, a Common Merganser rocketed out between my legs. A large brood of small ducklings accompanied her along with her raucous squawking and thrashing of her wings.

What made it worse was the hilarity exhibited by the boys in the survey crew accompanying me.