

# CLOSE encounters In The Great Outdoors

It was around 6:30 in the morning and we had just made a long, chilly ride to a secluded cove on the opposite end of the lake. It was early Fall and you could just barely see your breath in the cool Autumn air. The anticipation of another good day of fishing on our Canadian body of water was slightly delayed by the ride through a lengthy no-wake zone. It gave us time to warm our hands and think about what the first bait we should throw would be. We arrived at our spot, and like most days that week, there wasn't another soul in site. Not even the distant wail of another outboard to break the beautiful silence.

We killed the motor early, so we could quietly troll up to our spot in the back of the secluded cove. The bay was within a five minute ride of the eastern locks and was unnamed on the map, so we affectionately referred to it "Lock Ness," and the name stuck. The entire circumference of the bay is surrounded by big beautiful conifers and on a breezy day, you can smell the scent of pine wafting across the water. This morning was no exception. There are no houses on this stretch of the lake and it isn't uncommon for the tranquility to be broken by the loud *slap* of a beaver tail attached to a beaver who feels you are getting too close to his home.

With some topwater action on the brain, we eased up to within a hundred feet of the shore and began working our Pop-Rs between two clumps of lily pads. What happened next was something that neither of us expected. With our backs turned to the shoreline, and perhaps still a little groggy from rolling out of bed early, we received a massive **SNORT** from the shoreline. It was so loud and so powerful, it almost knocked me over. The volume of air that moved was so intense, that I felt it through my entire chest cavity. Our hearts suddenly racing, we quickly turned around to see what could have produced such a forceful bellow. At that point we were staring down a huge moose and her calf just a handful of yards away. Having never been up close to a moose before, I wouldn't have real-

ized how massive an animal they could be. I would compare this one to a small pickup truck on stilts. We were surprised, not only by its size, but how such a beast could wander up to the shoreline without us even hearing it. Apparently, mother moose was ticked off at us for getting too close to her calf and *politely* let us know. No problem. We *politely* moved away.

Like a lot of anglers, I spend numerous days a year out in the Great Outdoors and have had several encounters with wild animals... just minding my own business fishing. If you spend any amount of time on the water, you are bound to come in contact with a creature or two.

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There was another occasion that gave myself and a fishing buddy a startle. We were fishing the back end of Swartwood Lake near some small cottages. We suddenly heard some commotion, followed by a woman in the cottage directly in front of us screeching at the top of her lungs. "Alphie! Alphie, get in here!" she screamed. At exactly that moment, a healthy sized black bear came lumbering around the corner of her house with an intense look on his face. We suddenly realized that there might be a small child in danger and we immediately began yelling at the bear to distract it and perhaps give the woman a chance to rescue her child. Fearing we were about to witness something ugly, the bear reared up on his back legs and began banging his paws on the woman's door, smashing in her screen window. To up the fear factor a notch, the woman appeared on the opposite corner of the building, still calling out to Alphie. Finally, to our relief, Alphie, *the dog*, booked out from underneath the lattice of the deck and jumped into the woman's arms. All of this took place about fifty feet in

front of us. Adrenaline still pumping, we looked at each other, let out a few expletives and laughed nervously. Thankfully, the bear went on his merry way.

There have been scores of other encounters with wildlife in my years of fishing. I would say aggressive bats, snapping turtles, beavers and water snakes top the list of most frequent encounters. But the one that tops the list of "*closest encounters*" happened about ten years ago, when I used to stream fish for trout.

I was fishing a central portion of the Musconetcong River at a spot that a business client and fellow fisherman had recommended. It was a shallow section with scattered deeper pools, loaded with rainbows. I parked my car near a bridge and made my way downstream. At one point, I was fishing a nice wide section with thick woods on one bank and a large, grassy berm on the other. I knew there was a field on the other side of the berm, because I remember seeing it from the road as I passed by. I felt as though I was fishing in a trench, as the berm was higher than my six foot frame.

Without any warning, a loud thrash caught my attention to my right, where the berm sat. In a split second, the thrash turned into a huge deer buck leaping over the berm and landing **five feet** directly in front of me. The weight of this enormous buck shook the river bed with the impact and the splash from the water hit me in the face as I stumbled backward. In a single, breathless bound, the deer and his huge rack of antlers leapt another 25 feet onto the opposite bank and disappeared into the woods. I couldn't figure out who was more shocked. Me, standing there nearly soiling my waders, or the deer, who didn't realize such a chasm awaited him on the other side of that berm.

On my drive home, I started to think about how close I had just come to getting my skull bashed in by a flying deer. It would have put the meaning into "*coming into contact with wild animals.*" Who knows how long I might have laid there before I was found? I wonder how the police would have explained that one to my wife? **FL**