

BOREAL BITS

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THE DOE AND THE DOG

'Amusement to an observing mind is study.' Benjamin Disraeli

On June 6, Arlene and Cuyler Cotton of Muriel Lake observed an incident that is rarely seen in our area. At about three in the afternoon under a nicely sunny sky—itsself a rarity for early June—a whitetail doe chased a Labrador-size dog around their yard, the deer bent on the dog's destruction as much as the dog was bent on its own survival.

The deer was no stranger to the Cottons. It was part of a small herd of whitetails that frequented the area for much of the winter. The hierarchy of the herd was well defined with a large buck dominating all, a large older female next in line, followed by a younger female. Yearling fawns occupied the lower positions. We have observed this type of social structure over the years and have despaired at the hard life of the fawns that have no mother to stick up for them.

Deer are hardly the gentle types portrayed in Disney's *Bambi*. A Sioux Narrows resident was feeding deer during the "Feed the Deer Campaign" when heavy

snows threatened the herds in the late 1990's. She was absolutely appalled when an older doe lifted onto its back feet and struck a fawn so powerfully that it killed the young deer.



(P Burke)

The doe in the Cotton story was number three in the hierarchy of the local herd. Arlene suggests that it may be the daughter of the older doe who was in the number two position. Number Three became quite tame over the winter and would take apples from the hands of the Cottons and was therefore very identifiable.

On this day in early June the neighbourhood dog, Marilyn—so nicknamed because of her blond hair and blue eyes—came over for a visit at the same time Number Three happened on the scene. It is highly likely that the two had met before but it seems that the larger the herd the easier it is to spook them; one becomes fidgety and the others follow suit. This time, however, the aggressive nature of Number Three rose to the surface when it saw its mortal enemy, a member of the canine family.

Wolves and deer have been around for millennia and it is the deer that have

been one of the staple foods of the carnivores. A young, sick, or old deer is no match for the combined jaws of members of a wolf pack and the response to the threat of canine attack is instinctive. As in most stressful situations, the response may be fight or flight and most of the time deer choose flight. Obviously, this time the deer chose the fight response.

For about thirty seconds the deer gave chase. The dog realized it had no chance against the hooves of this raging beast and beat a hasty retreat with the deer close behind. A deer can easily outdistance a dog but the dog had the advantage of agility and zigzagged its way across the yard at top speed. The only problem was that the deer kept up, its nose less than two tail lengths away from the frightened dog. The dog doubled back but still the deer kept pace. Finally the dog raced across the road toward a wooded area—and possibly home—with the enraged doe in close pursuit. Half an hour later the doe returned. The dog has since been seen, none the worse for wear. To this date there is no indication that the doe was protecting a fawn, that is, the doe has not been seen in the company of a fawn.



(P Burke)

An incident involving a deer attack on a family pooch was reported in the Eugene, Oregon press. The owner of the dog said the deer blindsided her and

her two dogs the moment they walked onto their deck in their fenced backyard. A wildlife specialist suggested that the doe was exhibiting its aggressive, dominant nature. If it weren't for the dog's owner beating the doe with a stick the dog would have succumbed. As it was the English setter suffered severe injury during the 45-second attack. In the same article, mention is made of a woman who was chased into her house by a deer. As the wildlife specialist stated, "It's a common scenario: Neighbours adopt deer, feed deer, deer loses fear of humans, deer attacks humans or pets," he said.

Wild animals are just that... wild