

# Valley Angler Encounters With Critters by Bill Thompson

One of the nice side benefits to angling is the varied wildlife that one encounters while on the stream. It is not uncommon for fishermen, in this part of the country, to see deer and moose on a regular bases. Just the other morning a doe and her fawn took time out to watch me and another fellow fish for several minutes. Not long after they had moved on another much larger doe crossed the river just up stream from us. Needless to say the experience just made the day's outing just that much better.

Not quite as common, but not that unusual is to spot a bear. Just about every angler I know has a bear story. In our neck of the woods encountering a black bear is generally not much concern for alarm, but those anglers who have fished in the western part of the country or in Alaska will tell you that coming close to a grizzly can be hair raising.

A year ago a customer rushed into the shop early one morning panting and trying to catch his breath. He blurted out that he had just met a bear at the edge of the golf course as he had just entered the woods to access the "Glade Pool" on the Saco. Janet remarked, "the bear was no doubt just as scared of him as he was of the bear". Judging by the guys' demeanor I would guess that the opposite was true as he was definitely more frightened than the bear. When this guy comes in the shop now he always announces that he was the guy who saw the bear.

The subject of bears comes up often when I am guiding. It usually comes up when we are walking out of the woods at night at the end of our trip. It is always tempting to make up some blood curdling story, but I generally refrain.

A couple of years ago I was leading a party of three fishermen up to the "Corn Field Pool". When we got past the "Outlook Pool" there were some very fresh bear tracks heading in the same direction as we were. Not far from where the tracks started they started coming towards us. I am no Dan'l Boon, but it was pretty evident that we were very close to a good sized bear. Just about that time one of my sports asked, "Ever see any bear up here?".

In the many years that Janet and I have fished in Yellowstone Park we have never had a close encounter with a bear of any-kind. Others, of course are more fortunate or unfortunate as the case may be. I have always been disappointed that we have never seen a "Griz", but on the other hand have been grateful not to have had a "close encounter".

Those who fish in Alaska just about always have a great story. Chris Major, the publisher of Fly Fish America, told me a story of encountering a grizzly in Alaska that would keep you fishing in the lower "Forty-Eight". According to Chris the fishing party he was with was charged three times by a rather large bear. The local regulations prohibited the carrying of fire arms so the strategy was to gather the party together and try to present a large profile. Chris said that they

all gathered in a group with their guide and were told to raise their hands in the air to make them look taller. I would have thought that the bear might have taken it as a sign of surrender.

Moose stories are also popular with anglers. I did have a friend who was once treed by one, however most moose stories are more serene. Like the radio spots on 1050 AM, the local information station, say, "I am often asked where to find a moose?". This could be the second most asked question, right after "where can I find a trout?" that we hear in the shop.

This past week I probably witnessed the most unusual critter encounter that I will ever see. What makes it even more amazing is that it happened twice in the same week. No it was not a horrifying encounter with a bear or a moose. The first time it happened was last Tuesday in the Outlook Pool on the Saco around 11:30 in the morning. The client I was fishing with suddenly said, "What's that?" in a startled voice. I looked over to his right and a furry thing was swimming across the pool. I first thought it was a mink, but at that moment my client and I blurted out in unison, "It's a squirrel"! And indeed it was a red squirrel. Considering the size of some of the brown trout in this pool I would have thought that the swimming rodent was taking a considerable risk.

Now if this were not weird enough two days latter in the same pool at just about the same time of day I was with another customer when off to our left we heard a resounding splat. We both took the sound as a large rising fish and immediately turned in the direction of the splash. Much to my surprise there was the same red squirrel doing the squirrel paddle across the pool. At the same time my client and I looked up in time to see a large limb about thirty feet above us waving about. It was apparent that the squirrel had just made a swan dive from the limb. We theorized that either this fellow was a thrill seeker or had been adopted by flying squirrels as an infant and was under the impression that he should be able to fly. In any case it was evident that he was, shall we say, squirrely.

See you on the river.