

THE BACK PORCH RANGER

by Melissa Kay Bishop

The Curious Case of Cat and Deer

The warming temperatures are calling the white-tail deer to disband their large winter herds and break off into smaller family units. As the growth of spring flowers begins, they forsake the evergreens of winter to come to our yards to dine on spring greens. Many does are now seen with large bellies ready to give birth soon and provide the world with new little Bambis.

I am one of the odd people that consider myself lucky to have deer visit my yard on a daily basis, mainly because I do not have a vegetable garden to defend. Through watching them, I have found them to be majestic, cautious, and yet very curious creatures.

For Christmas, my family gave ourselves the gift of a one-year-old cat that we

adopted from the local shelter. She is a wonderful being that has come into our lives and as most good pets will do, has provided us with a lot of entertainment.

On one of the first warm days this winter, the kind that fools you into thinking it is time to start working in the garden, the cat and I went out in the yard to excavate a patch filled with useless tulips. Useless because as soon as they shoot up, the deer come along and nibble them off. Before that happened, I thought it best to get rid of the bulbs and put something else in their place such as shady herbs like lambs ear, or fragrant herbs, or make room for daffodils, all of which are not on the deer menu.

As the cat and I were enjoying the sun on our backs and the dirt under our

claws, a winter herd of fourteen deer came into the yard close to where we were working. I suspect they saw the decimation of one of their favorite spring dining spots and came out of concern. As they passed through, the cat, who had possibly never seen deer before, watched with wide-eyed amazement. "Those are some big dogs, huh?" I said to her.

As they passed out of the yard and into the woods, the cat, belonging to a species that is notoriously curious, followed the herd. The deer stopped and slowly, cautiously, approached the cat who now took on a predator demeanor.

One large doe stepped up to my senile feline. She was probably the winter herd's leader as they are ruled by an adult doe and not a buck. She took on the responsibility of checking out the possible danger while her followers

watched like statues. The cat and the deer stood a foot away from each other and after much tail-twitching from both parties and some warning hoof stomps from



the deer; the cat suddenly took a flying claws-out leap at the mammoth beast. You could almost hear the herd shriek with fear as they stampeded back into the

woods, but curiosity got the best of them and they returned to inspect this small, but brave new oddity in their territory.

It did not take long for the leader to instigate the amazing sight of interspecies nose sniffing, cat to deer. After thoroughly inspecting each other, the leader must have let the others know that this was no mountain lion, but a pussycat and most of the herd took their turn smelling every inch of my wonder pet.

The days are much warmer now and the deer come to the yard in smaller groups at dawn or dusk. We have watched the relationship between the cat and deer evolve and as we were recently enjoying the evening by having dinner on the back porch, our entertain-

ment was watching the cat stalk three deer as they grazed on the lawn.

Like a lion on the African plains, she slithered through the grass up to each deer. As she popped up, they showed that they knew who she was by giving no reaction other than a jerk of the head. The cat simply gave in to sitting among them while they moved about her.

It will be interesting to see as the year goes by whether they will become allies or foes. If I see kitty curled up with them in last fall's leaf bed, I will know the answer.

Melissa Kay Bishop is a journalist and wildlife hobbyist living in Oak Ridge, Tennessee. After years of volunteering and working with creatures great and small, she now chronicles the ones who visit her own yard. She can be reached at backporchranger@gmail.com.




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