

Beavers by Thrush Light



There is a quality of light, just after sunset on summer evenings, when the foliage in the foreground pales and shadows deepen. I call this “thrush light.” It marks that time when the bustle of daytime stills. Like performers in an opera, the thrushes wait in the wings for the audience to hush, then they flit onstage and fill the darkening forest with their sweetest notes.

Thrush light is also a good time to watch beavers. I invite you to join me in thrush light at the same pond where I composed my last column a month ago. At the time, I was delivering antibiotic-laced apples to Dew, the intrepid beaver who had been injured by a bear. Tonight we are not waiting for Dew. We are waiting for Gentian. And the thrushes. While we wait, I’ll fill you in on the events that have ensued.

Two days after I wrote the last column, and five days into treatment, I arrived at Dew’s pond and found her on the shore, bug-eyed and gasping for breath. I left her a medicated apple and headed home, filled with sorrow for the suffering of this good old beaver.

The next morning I returned with a shroud. Dew was gone and so was the apple. I found her sleeping the sunshine in a little hollow she had made on the streambank. With her fur dry and fluffy, I could see damp traces left by draining wounds on her shoulders and back. The deep laceration on her wrist was healing, though the paw was still very swollen.

While you and I might enjoy a snooze in the sunshine on a streambank, this is strange behavior for a beaver. They usually sleep in the darkness and security of their dens. Earlier this spring, however, I was called to rescue a severely injured beaver from the base of the Bellows Falls hydro dam. A dog walker had seen this beaver hunkered on the shore for a few days. I wondered why the poor creature was not

sheltering in a place where she would feel secure. Yet when Dew was injured, she also began spending her days on the shore, rain or shine. Is there something in a beaver’s mind that tells them fresh air speeds healing? Does it?

That night I returned and waited, but I saw no sign of Dew. I left her an apple. The next morning it was still there. Either Dew had crawled into her den and was too sick to come out, or she had moved away.

Her nearest neighbor lived a mile upstream, and I thought he might be Henry, the former mate of Dew’s mother, Willow. That night, I decided I would start looking for Dew there and would work my way downstream.

Standing below the dam of that upstream site, the surface of the pond is at eye-level. Spires of spruce and fir give the scene a wild northern feeling. I could see the ripples of a beaver swimming, so I called a greeting. The beaver turned and paddled over. As it hoisted itself onto the shore, I saw the gashed paw, swollen shoulder, and notched tail of Dew.

Lucky for you, my word limit prevents describing the many puzzles that emerged as I tried to sort out which beavers were living where and why. To summarize, Dew has finished her convalescence in the upstream pond with Henry, her new mate. Gentian, the two-year-old kit of Willow and Henry, has settled in Dew’s former establishment. All are thriving as we head into the easy days of summer.

Gentian has always been shy, but now that she is on her own, I think she might like some company. So we sit by the pond and wait. The exquisite notes of a hermit thrush float from the woods upstream. From downstream, a little beaver paddles toward us. May you find such joy in thrush light.