

## I'm Sorry. I was having a very bad day

I behaved badly at a meeting on Wednesday morning. I interrupted people. I was undiplomatic. If any fellow participants read this, please accept my apology. I was having a very bad day.

In this column last month, I introduced the three orphaned beaver kits I have been doing my best to raise. A week ago, Old Chub, the most precocious of the three, refused to get out of bed. A vet check-up found no problems, but his condition deteriorated. On his last day, Old Chub could only take a few steps before he had to lie down to rest. He spent the day sleeping in my lap while I hoped for a call from someone who would know just what to do. The death gasps came in the late afternoon, and the end followed swiftly.

I could not pause to grieve the loss of this creature who had brought me such delight. Pumpkin was sick too. Pumpkin has always been the cuddliest of the kits, often on my heels and reaching up for a hug. Now that we knew the likely progression of the illness, Dr. Svec and I doubled down to try to figure out what it might be. In the meantime, I started Pumpkin on an antibiotic that had helped before and extra supportive care.

On the Wednesday morning in question, I hurried through morning chores, noting that Pumpkin did not seem any better. I am not usually one to fume, but I was in a volcanic mood as I drove across town. The last thing I wanted to do was go to a gathering to discuss the consequences of a beaver dam removal by the Marlboro road crew.

I joined the neighbors, Town officials, and someone from the Vermont Department of Fish & Wildlife at the crime scene. It was a lovely morning. Those gathered seemed interested in working together amicably to prevent such events in the future. I paced with my arms crossed and glowered.

The Marlboro Road crew has managed beaver issues by covering culverts with grates and using a backhoe to pull them up and clear them if

The observation deck on one of Skip's beaver deceivers in Marlboro.

they get clogged. When beavers are at work in an area, this can happen overnight. At this site, the beavers had raised the water level downstream so they could swim into the culvert from below. They had created quite a jam. The road crew had tried ramming it out with a telephone pole and giant tire. When these techniques did not work well, the downstream dam was removed. At least I think that's how it was explained. I was not paying close attention. Usually, I'm willing to laugh along when our road foreman describes the challenges of maintaining roads in beaver country. That morning, I was not in the mood.

The thing is, I have been encouraging the town to eliminate these beaver conflict sites for years, and progress has been made. Thanks to grants and a one-year allocation of highway budget funds, Skip Lisle has installed his signature beaver deceivers at five sites in Marlboro. Skip is a biologist who has devoted his life to solving beaver conflicts. His company, Beaver Deceivers International, is based in nearby Grafton.

Road crews spend a lot of time trying to outsmart beavers. They know how determined beavers can be when it comes to stopping the flow of water. I don't blame them for being skeptical of anyone who claims they know how to do it. I know beavers too. I wouldn't trust just anyone to come up with the right answer. I might give credence to the recommendations of someone who has worked exclusively on this very issue for the past three decades.

The Fish and Wildlife representative was a very nice, earnest young man. If I had been myself, I would have been paying attention when he introduced himself. I think he was the "beaver technician," a seasonal employee hired by the Department each year to solve beaver conflicts. I should have been happy that he was there to help, but I was not. I know from the work I've seen and conversations I've had with previous beaver technicians that

their devices are in no way the equivalent of Skip's. Don't get me wrong, in cases where a landowner is unwilling or unable to pay what it takes to resolve a conflict, I'm very glad the state has a program that subsidizes devices that might work. If, however, you want to invest in a solution that will work, needs little attention, and will save you money for years, pay Skip for his expertise.

The technician talked gamely about the possibilities and potential pitfalls for problem-solving at the site. He repeated the common misconception that beaver deceivers need a certain amount of water to work. He wasn't sure he could figure out how to keep the beavers from raising the water level downstream. When the landowner asked if the state could offer the town a better deal than Skip, I blurted, "that depends on if you want something that you know will work and will last thirty years."

Although I was sad and worried that morning, my frustration arose from a long-standing disappointment in humanity. We, who have usurped so much of the planet for our own use, should be willing to go to some trouble and expense if necessary, to humanely resolve conflicts with our fellow creatures. Especially when we are creating attractions like culverts and gardens and henhouses. By "humanely," I don't mean transporting an animal to a strange new territory already occupied by a host of rivals.

Today, Pumpkin is sitting on my lap enjoying some violet leaves. He has been swimming with his sister in their pool and has started work on a dam. He keeps up a steady conversation of whine-squeaks. I hope I will be able to get him successfully through childhood. If I do, I hope he will find places where people are welcoming and willing to make accommodations, if needed, so he can do his good beaver work. If that's not the case, let me just offer a blanket apology in advance. It is possible that I will behave badly.