A Bestiary: Part Eight – Common Raccoon (Procyon lotor)

By Carol Duke 13 Comments

Impressions have a way of staying with us long after a traumatic experience has past. Adventures with wildlife can sometimes leave one with permanent fears and prejudice especially when a violent encounter occurs. These threads of thoughts lead the way into my next installment of 'A Bestiary' . . . featuring the dexterous and discerning Common Raccoon.

THE INTIAL ENCOUNTER

Going back into our forest of twenty four years ago, my son Sean, his friend Max and I are walking into the pine grove and towards a small spring where we notice a raccoon lying flat on its belly atop a boulder. The raccoon's four legs are spread out and dangling over the large granite rock. It is a shady, cool, green setting hidden from the hot summer day and the beast looked to be cooling off . . . but very odd. The year is 1988 and as yet I have not heard of rabid raccoons in our midst, but I warn the boys not to go close to the reclusive animal.

THE ATTACK

We are about to walk further down into the wood, when suddenly the raccoon climbs down from the rock and appears to be walking away from us. I sense something very wrong and remain alert to its behavior. My instincts are correct . . . for it quickly turns around and literally charges right at us. The seemingly languid *lotor* of minutes before becomes lively and fierce with absolute intention to attack. The boys begin to run off and I shout "Wait!" and ask Max to give me the sturdy walking stick he was carrying. Within seconds I have the sapling held as a weapon of defense from the mad beast and tell Sean and Max to run up the hill out of the forest to the house and call for help.

THE RABID RAVAGE

So, here I am in the middle of a dark forest engaged in a battle with what I believe must be a rabid raccoon. I was merely on the defensive and screaming at the raccoon to stop so that I would not have to hit it's head, which was mostly exposed fangs at this point . . . the sickness in it's brain transforms the more often adorable masked face into a frightening and ferocious attacking beast . . . lurching towards me with every intention of tearing flesh. Even now writing about this encounter gives me chills thinking what might have happened if I had fallen. The Beech sapling walking stick protected me, though I could feel and hear the impact of its solidness stopping the head of the raccoon. The sound of each strike was horrid as the raccoon attacked and I had to keep it back. After several minutes of this confrontation the animal did become more lethargic again and surprisingly the boys reappeared saying they had talked and were afraid to leave me alone in case I fell. Both lads remarked at how they hardly recognized my voice looming out of the wood . . . as if some other strong being had taken over my body and was shouting at the ravaged beast.

ENVIRONMENTAL POLICE

The raccoon does at long last begin to lay down on the ground giving me and the boys time to safely flee the forest. When I get to the house I immediately call the police who give me the number of the Environmental police. When they arrive, I go back down the hill and show the police where we last saw the raccoon. We do not have to walk as deep this time, for the raccoon was closer to the entrance to the forest walking around in circles. Many raccoons fell prey to rabies that year in Western Massachusetts and continued to do so for several more years.

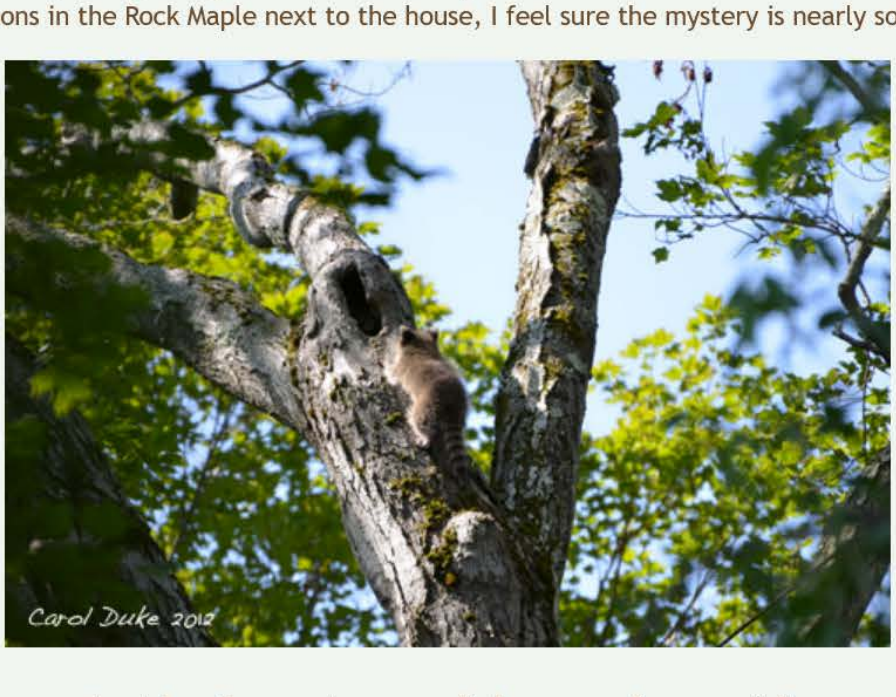
The forest has never felt the same since.

LASTING IMPRESSION

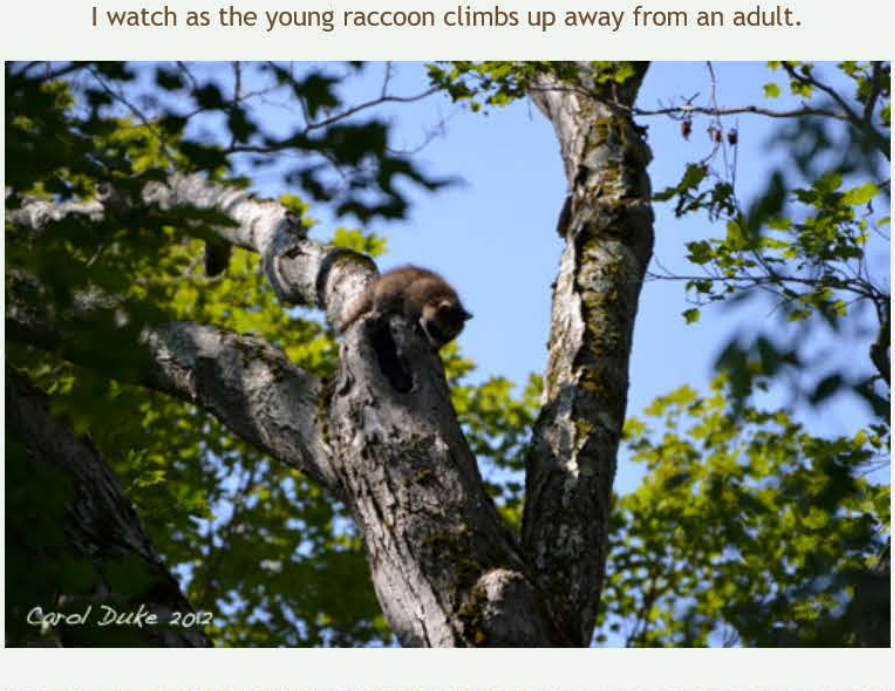
After this harrowing encounter with a demented raccoon, it is hard to erase those memories and I have been very happy not to meet another raccoon for many years . . . until . . . this spring.

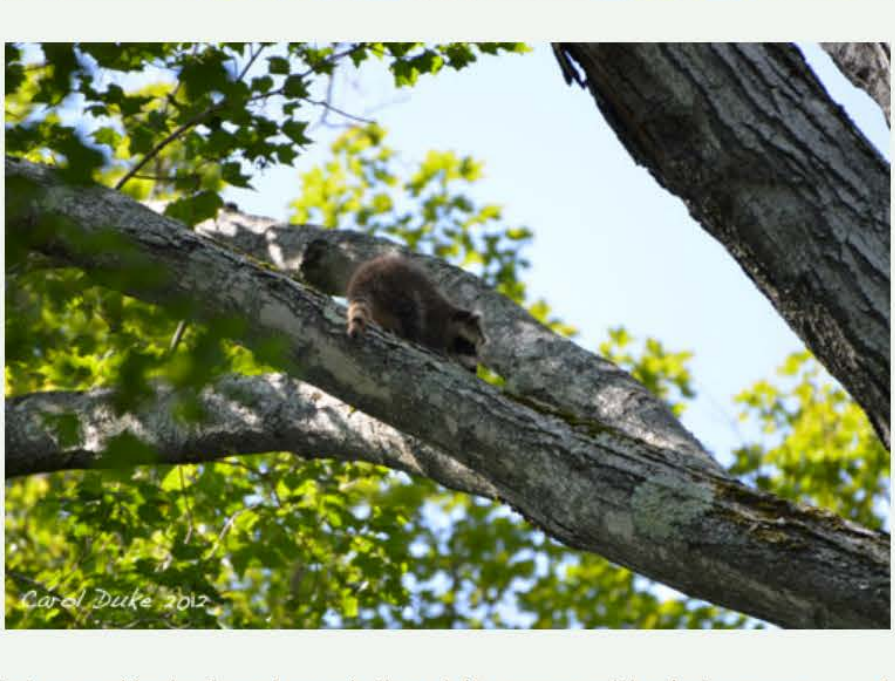
Carol Duke 2012

The night before these photographs are taken I am sleeping soundly until startling screams enter my dream and wake me. I cannot imagine what beast is making the eerie sounds that come across as being very close by. I do envision some creature hurting another and it goes on for nearly an agonizing hour. In the morning I hear a few more screams and when I see raccoons in the Rock Maple next to the house, I feel sure the mystery is nearly solved.

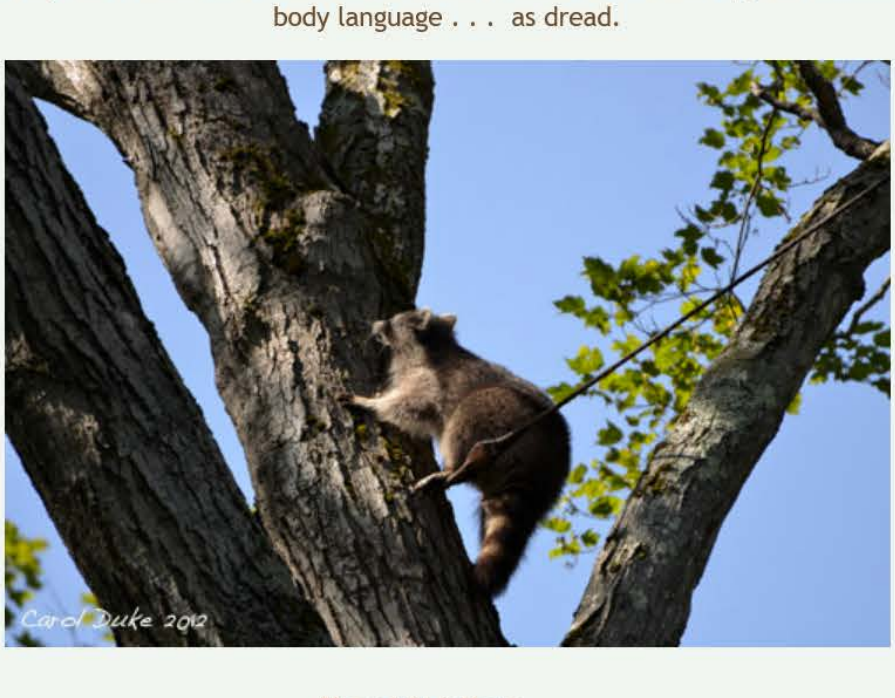


I watch as the young raccoon climbs up away from an adult.





The kit stops and looks down towards the adult raccoon with what appears . . . from its body language . . . as dread.



The adult follows . . .

Carol Duke 2012

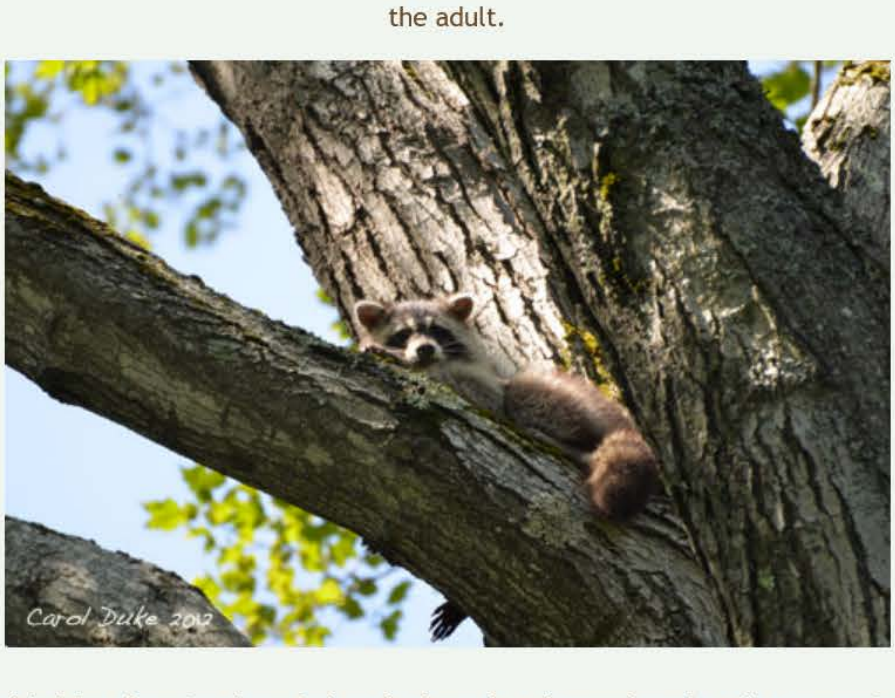
The adult raccoon stops for a rest and looks a bit out of sorts . . . the image awakens my memory of the rabid raccoon from the forest and I call the police thinking this could be a sick animal.

Carol Duke 2012

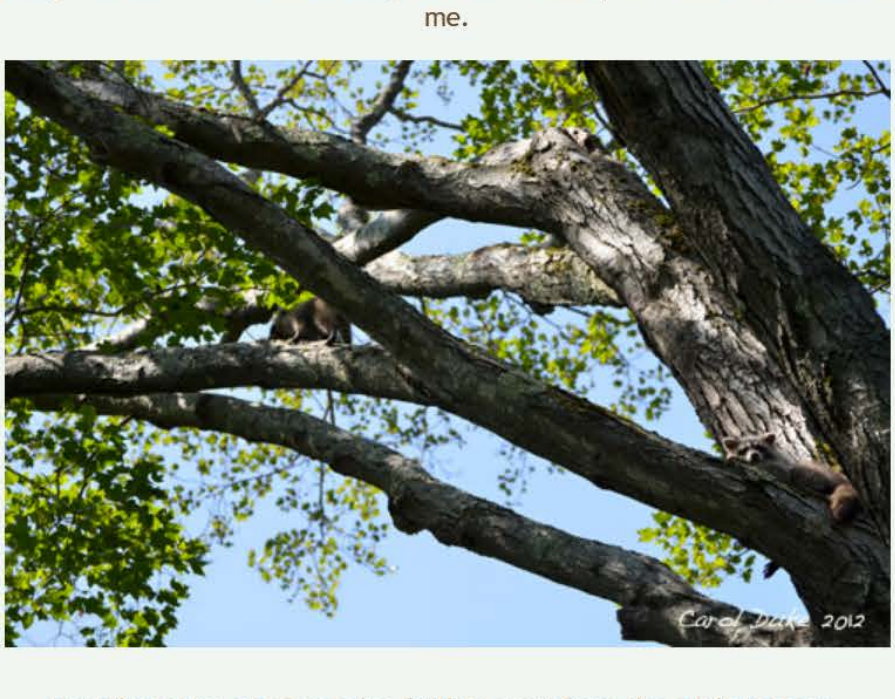
Here the adult raccoon is looking up at the kit . . . I imagine these to be parent and young but cannot say for sure if this is a male or female adult. There is clearly trepidation and tension between the two.

Carol Duke 2012

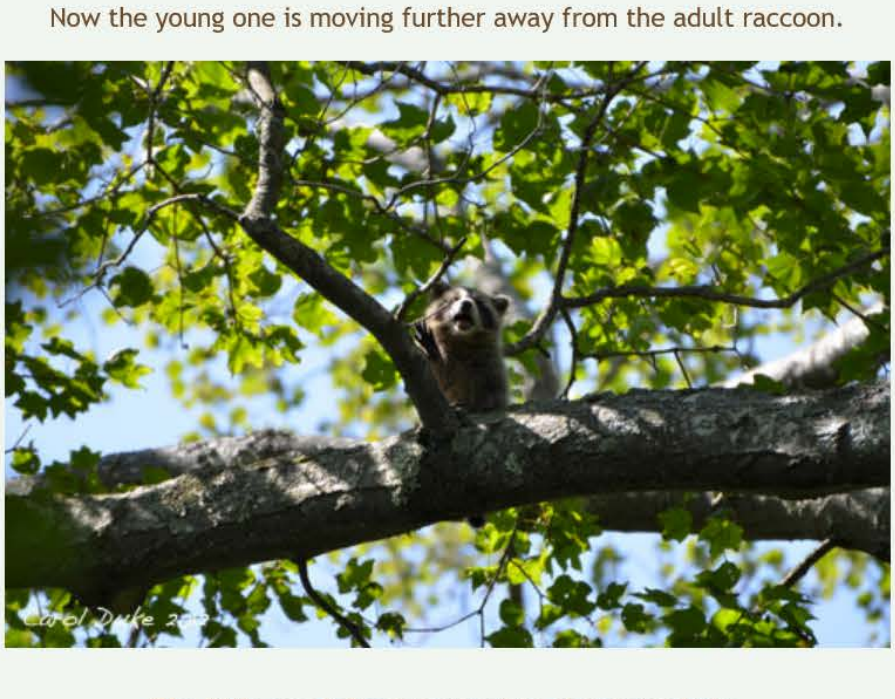
If you look carefully you can see the young raccoon resting about six feet away to the left of the adult.



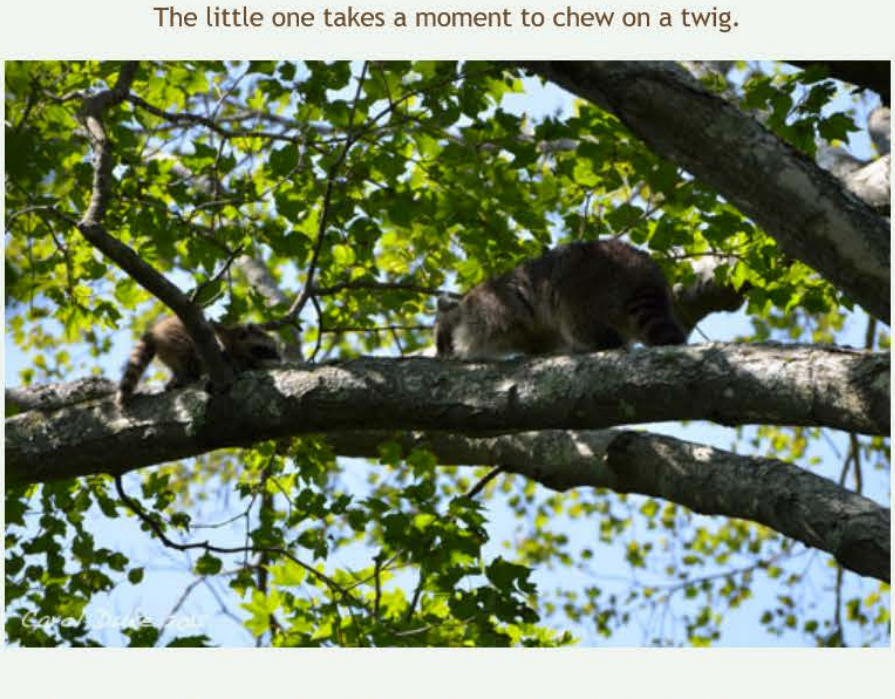
Note the hind foot hanging down below the branch. I do wonder what the perception of this creature might be as it looks down on myself and the two policewomen who arrive to help me.



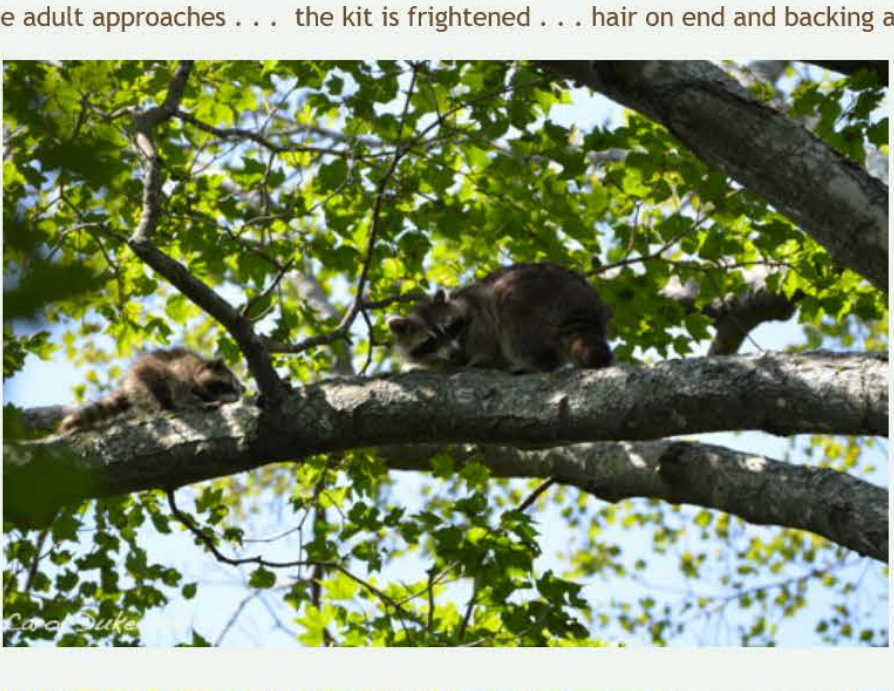
Now the young one is moving further away from the adult raccoon.



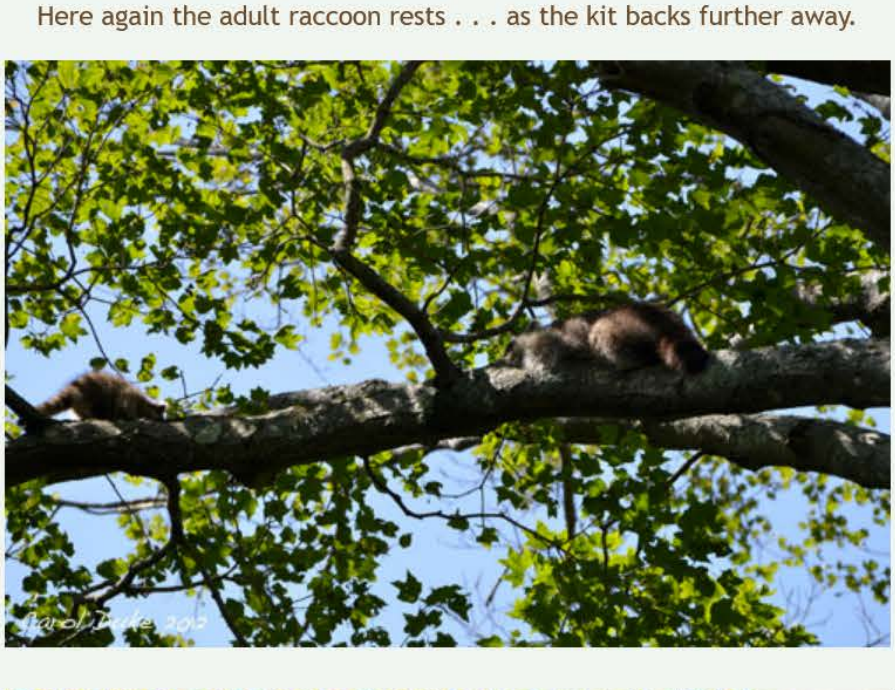
The little one takes a moment to chew on a twig.



As the adult approaches . . . the kit is frightened . . . hair on end and backing away.

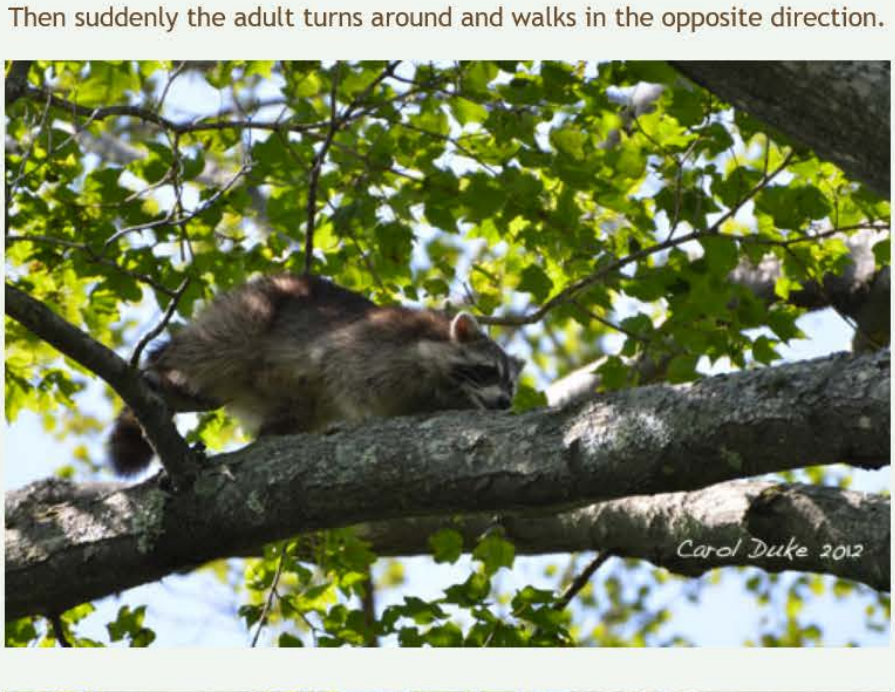


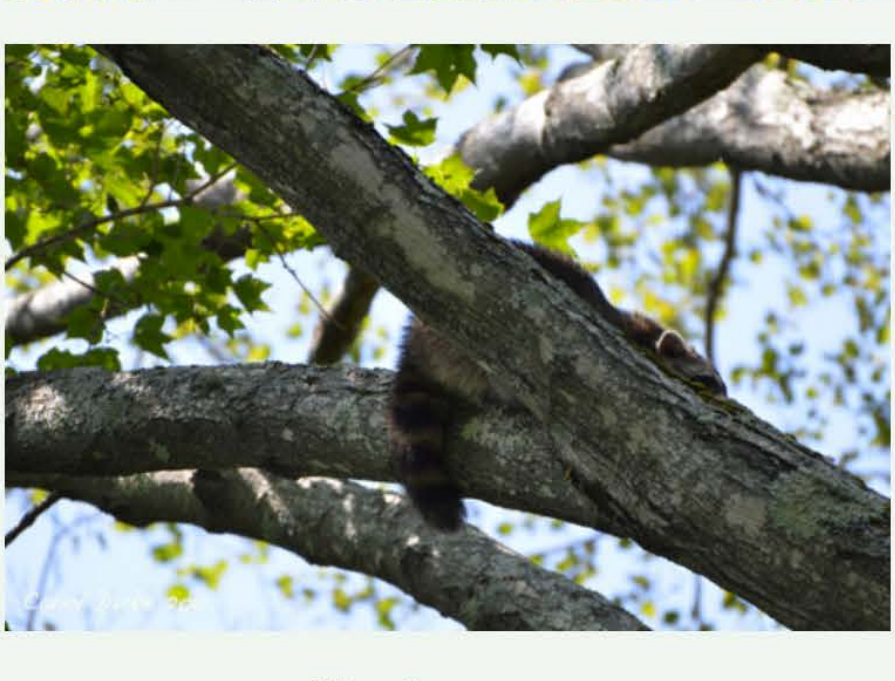
Here again the adult raccoon rests . . . as the kit backs further away.



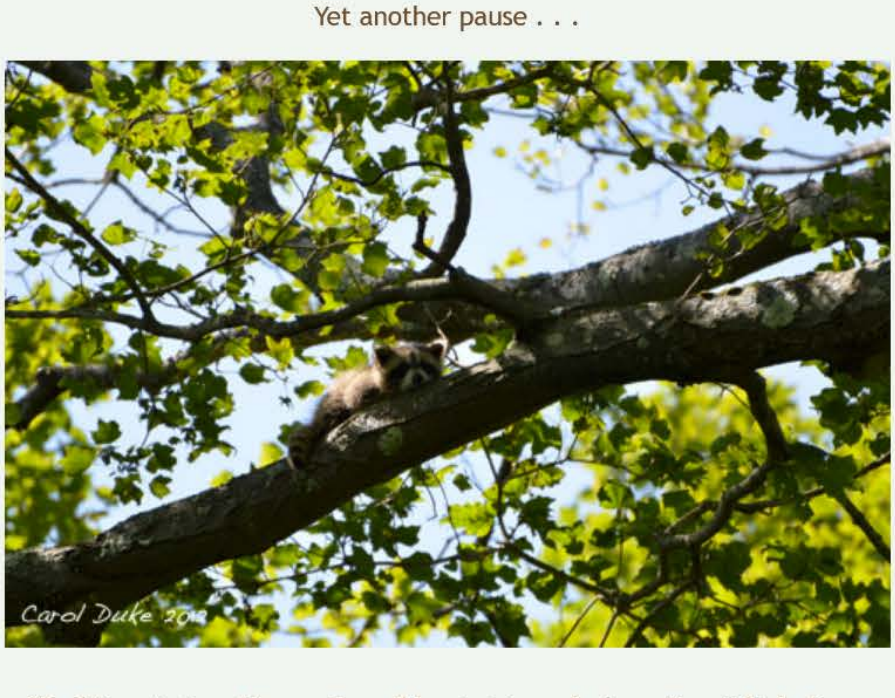
Carol Duke 2012

Then suddenly the adult turns around and walks in the opposite direction.





Yet another pause . . .



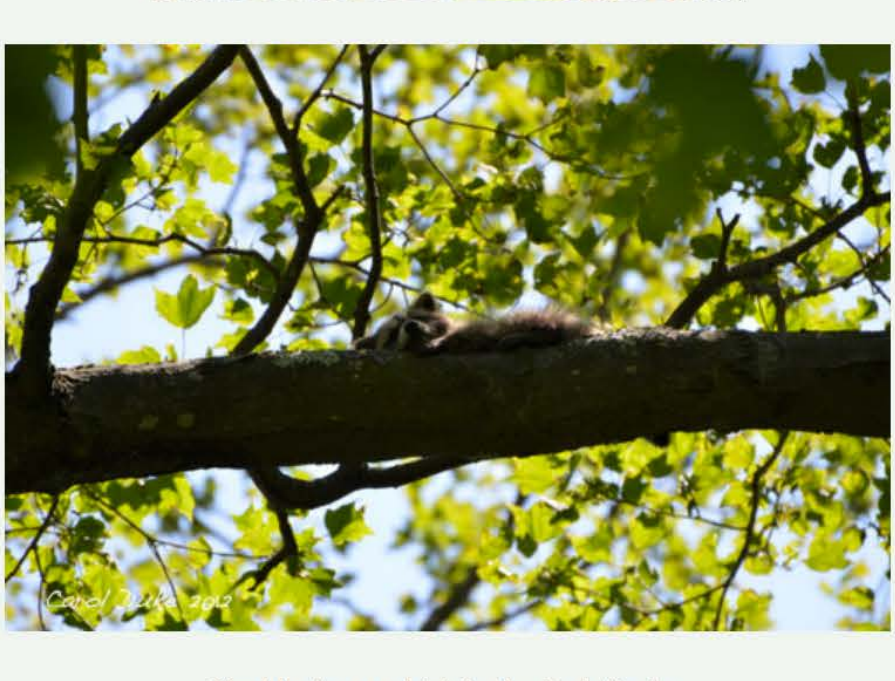
The kit rests too. I know they did not get much sleep the night before.

Carol Duke 2012

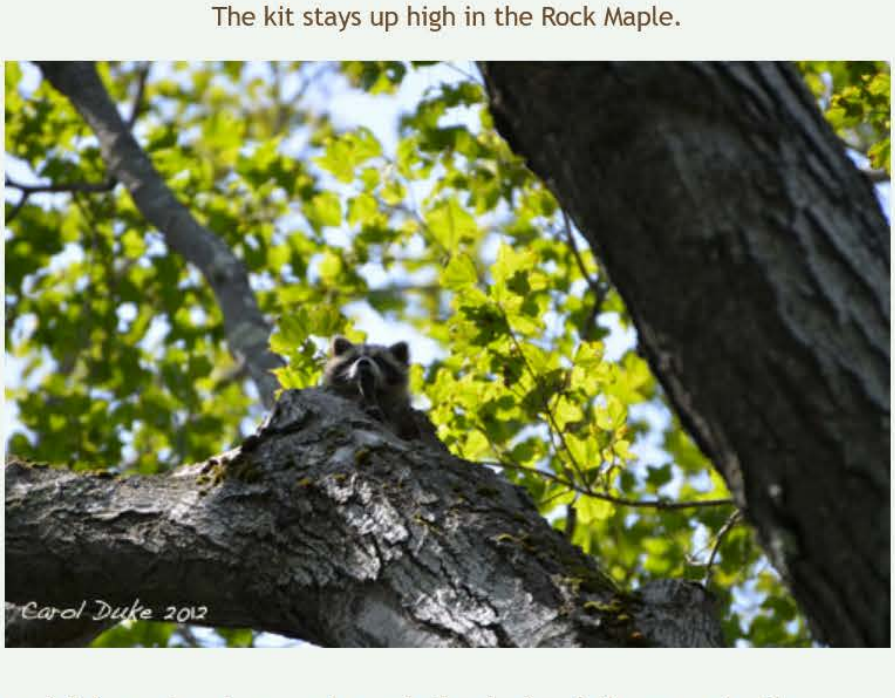
At this point the policewomen have left but asked me to call when the raccoon comes down.

I had never seen an animal climbing down a tree head first but later learn that raccoons often do. At the time I thought it more proof that something was wrong with this animal.

Carol Duke 2012



The kit stays up high in the Rock Maple.



While the adult/parent rushes over towards the shed and disappears inside . . . never to be seen by me again. Be they parent and kit or not I have not seen or heard either beast in the last few months.

My impressions may have been completely wrong here. I allow my prejudice from my first awful encounter to lead me to conclude the worst too hastily . . . though I did hear such nightmarish screams and then the certain fear of the kit when the adult approached.

The mystery is still as puzzling as before. The kit appears too young to be left on its own. Most female raccoons will stay with their young until fall . . . this story takes place in May. If indeed the adult is the parent of the kit it seems unlikely she would be trying to frighten the young one into independence so early. Also, I cannot accept such brutal severing of kinship.

Male raccoons are known to kill kits . . . could the adult be a male? Its behavior reminds me of the rabid raccoon but perhaps distemper is a more apt explanation. The spring day is not a hot one and all the resting seems strange. Something surely is amiss between the two animals and I am left with questions . . . that so far . . . no one has yet to answer.

More Wildlife Garden Bestiary Entries:

Virginia Opossum

North American Porcupine

Cottontail Rabbit

Weasel

Red Fox

Eastern Coyote

Bobcat

White-Tailed Deer

© 2012, Carol Duke. All rights reserved. This article is the property of Native Plants and Wildlife Gardens. If you are reading this at another site, please report that to us

Share this: Facebook Twitter Pinterest Google +1 StumbleUpon More

Filed Under: Mammals Tagged With: Raccoon, Wildlife

About Carol Duke
Carol Duke is an artist and farmer, who has given much of the last thirty years to caring for her twenty-one acre hillside farm in Western Massachusetts. Her greatest joy in working with the land has been to see how her farm has become home to a diverse community of wildlife. Through her blog Flower Hill Farm, Carol shares the beauty of living closely with nature and how with careful consideration of conservation and only using organic practices, while being a steward to the land, one can create a true sanctuary for native flora and fauna. Her facebook and twitter pages are used mostly for action alerts to inspire activism towards protecting wild places and wildlife the world over. Flower Hill Farm has also become a Retreat for guests visiting the area from all over the world.

Comments

Loret T. Setters says:
July 13, 2012 at 12:15 pm

fabulous photos and interactive story as always, Carol! Your 1988 encounter brought chills up my spine. Always a scare when nature behaves out of character. Thank goodness for the walking stick!

The night screaming tho, is a familiar sound from my time in NY. The raccoons that lived by me made the most bone-chilling horendous sounds I'd ever heard from a small mammal. Apparently that was just their way. They were night screamers. They always sounded like they were killing each other, yet the same number would be using the fence line like a tightrope night in, night out.

down here in FL, I don't see them as their preference is to stay down the block in the deeper woods, which if they ever get the notion to be baring teeth and racing toward me, I'm etermally grateful.

Loret T. Setters recently posted..As one disappears another moves in

REPLY

Carol Duke says:
July 16, 2012 at 12:27 pm

Thank you Loret! The screams are new to me and then seeing the young one acting so wary of the adult . . . well, I still do not know what to think. Thanks so for sharing.

Carol Duke recently posted..Waxing and Waning – The World Around Us – Bluebird Broods

REPLY

Tracy Flanagan says:
June 11, 2013 at 10:04 pm

Very entertaining article. Thank you. If it was the horrible "omg! something is being killed and ripped apart" noise you are talking about, that is the sound of romance in raccoon land. The kit doesn't look like she's too young. Plenty old enough to be away from mama. I think what you heard and witnessed, was a very insistent and persistent suitor. And I think she just wasn't quite in the mood yet. He didn't look sick. The first thing to go in a sick raccoon is their coat and he didn't show any coat distress. It is a horrible thing to hear and even though I'm very used to it and it's natural, I still go out and break up date night several times a month. I completely understand your distress over what you went through and how it would cause you to react in a certain way now to any altered behavior on the raccoon's part. I hope this puts your mind to rest at least a little.

REPLY

Donna@Gardens Eye View says:
July 13, 2012 at 2:46 pm

What a frightening encounter…we do not like to see raccoons because they do have rabies or other illnesses… so in our old neighborhood, we tended to have them trapped and removed humanely. Here we luckily do not see them in our area….it does sound like this adult was attacking the kit perhaps…scary!

Donna@Gardens Eye View recently posted..Grocery Gardening

REPLY

Sue Sweeney says:
July 15, 2012 at 7:57 am

Donna – Do you know that trapping and remote release results in a 75% chance that the animal will die alone, frightened and hungry? Much kinder to kill it.

REPLY

Carol Duke says:
July 16, 2012 at 12:33 pm

Thanks for sharing Donna. The whole encounter is still a mystery to me. I believe I was wrong in calling the police and feel very glad that they did not kill the raccoon, who has never been seen or heard here again.

Carol Duke recently posted..Waxing and Waning – The World Around Us – Bluebird Broods

REPLY

Sue Sweeney says:
July 13, 2012 at 5:11 pm

I always look forward to the Bestiary. Scary story this time but part of the reality of wild animals – they aren't zoo-cute.

I don't know why the raccoon you saw recently was acting the way it did. This might give you a hint or two: Here's a link http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l0OckXBcMSQ&feature=plcp to a video a I shot last May of a mother-child raccoon interaction at Scalzi Riverwalk Nature Preserve when the mother was trying desperately to get her child up a rain-slick tree trunk (where the den was) – the kid was too heavy for her to drag but too weak to get himself up the tree. The squeals you hear are coming from the baby — I think it was terrified of being left. I observed the mother's struggles for an hour before having to get on with other business. They weren't still on the ground the next day so she must have figured it out or taken her child to another lodging.

REPLY

Carol Duke says:
July 16, 2012 at 12:45 pm

Thank you Sue! Thank you for sharing the video too! I guess the little one here is more agile than the one you saw. They look about the same size. The mother seemed so caring and loving even when in a bit of a panic. The squeals were not half the volume and intensity of what I heard here. I guess it will remain an unsolved mystery for me.

Carol Duke recently posted..Waxing and Waning – The World Around Us – Bluebird Broods

REPLY

Heather says:
July 23, 2012 at 7:59 pm

Wow Carol, a scary encounter indeed. Rabies seemed really prevalent in the eighties, the county I grew up in had the highest rate of rabies then so a sick animal was always worrying. I've seen raccoons and squirrels here in MN in the winter with distemper. It's horrible, often the rear legs seem to become paralyzed.

Heather recently posted..Native Plant of the Week: Nodding Onion – Allium cernuum

REPLY

Carol Duke says:
September 11, 2012 at 8:39 pm

Thank you for sharing Heather. Yes, it was horrid really. It is so sad to see an animal so overtaken by rabies . . . creepy illness.

Carol Duke recently posted..Monarch Butterfly Life Cycle: A Metamorphosis – Part One – The Capable Caterpillar

REPLY

Trackbacks

Team Spotlight Carol Duke and The Bestiary says:
January 12, 2013 at 2:42 am

[…] Bestiary 8: Common Raccoon […]

REPLY

Raccoons in the Wildlife Garden says:
May 22, 2013 at 12:39 pm

[…] and are often found in urban areas. Feeding them cat or dog food is definitely not recommended. You really don't want to invite racoons that close to your house, as it may become dangerous for you, your family, and your […]

REPLY

City Living – Right of Passage says:
May 26, 2013 at 11:50 pm

[…] In my city of Toronto of almost 2.8 million people, it is estimated that there are 100,000 raccoons. That's a lot of fur flying when homeowners get exasperated dealing with the problems associated with raccoons: upturned-waste containers, dug up lawns, raccoon feces, intruders in the attic or shed. These urban raccoons are bold, not like their shy country cousins. […]

REPLY

Speak Your Mind

Name *

Email *

Website

POST COMMENT

☑ commentluv

☐ Notify me of follow-up comments by email.

☐ Notify me of new posts by email.

WREN SONG: OUR WEEKLY NEWSLETTER AND SUMMARY

Name:

Email:

Sign Up Now

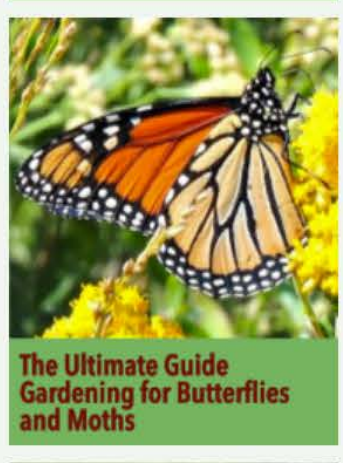
We respect your email privacy

Search this website…

SEARCH

ULTIMATE GUIDES

The Ultimate Guide to Attracting Native Bees to Your Wildlife Garden



The Ultimate Guide to Birdscaping Your Garden

WHAT'S NEW

- The Different Types of Natural Light for Use in Filmmaking
- Sidewalk Habitat Food Forest
- Reflections of a Native Plant Garden
- Rio Grande Nature Center Native Plant Garden
- A Bestiary: Part Nineteen ~ Songbirds: Warblers ~ Yellow-rumped Warbler
- Today is the First Day of a New Way of Thinking
- My Plants are Moving!
- National Pollinator Week, 2013
- Be a Habitat Hero: Garden for the Birds
- Adventures in Creating a Native Garden

TOPICS

Select Category

ARCHIVES

Select Month

OUR SISTER PUBLICATION

Beautiful Wildlife Garden REDEFINING BEAUTY IN YOUR GARDEN

NEWS FROM TEAM BEAUTIFUL WILDLIFE GARDEN

- Reptile Roundup
- Native Plant Garden for Gavin's Cabin
- Buffalo Gourd for Wildlife
- Get Wild About Soil
- Fledge
- Worms in the Sky
- Southeastern Native Vines
- A Visit to Rio Grande Nature Center
- Black Gum Nyssa Sylvatica Wildlife Friendly Shade Tree

WANT DAILY POSTS BY EMAIL INSTEAD OF WEEKLY?

Name:

Email:

Sign Up

TEAM BOOKS

TEAM SITES

- Beautiful Wildlife Garden
- Blackfoot Native Plants
- Carole Sevilla Brown
- Central Florida Critter of the Day
- Clean Green Natives
- Conservation Seeding & Restoration
- East 33
- Ecosystem Gardening
- Energy Wise Landscape Design
- Fiddlehead Creek
- Filmmaking Naturally
- Flower Hill Farm
- Garden of Possibilities
- Gardening With Soule
- Good Landscapes Design
- Green Gardening Matters
- Lawn Reform Coalition
- Lifescapes
- Living Green Roofs
- Metro Verde
- Metropolitan Field Guide
- New England Habitat Gardening
- Osceola Fl Garden Blah Blah Blog
- Pacific Northwest Flowers
- Pat And Clay Sutton
- Restoring the Landscape with Native Plants
- Roland Park Native
- Spore Lore
- Squash's Garden
- Susan J. Tweit
- Tech Birder
- The Deep Middle
- The Meadow Project
- The Web of Life
- Tweets & Treefrogs
- What Florida Native Plant is Blooming Today

GIVE US A LIKE

404 Not Found

FIND EACH TEAM MEMBER

Follow us on Facebook

NATURE BLOG NETWORK

THE TEAM

Beatriz Moisset, Pollinators, PA
Benjamin Vogt, The Deep Middle, NE
Carol Duke, Flower Hill Farm, MA
Carole Brown, Ecosystem Gardening, PA
Catherine Zimmerman, Meadow Project, MD
Christina Kobland, Native Return, PA
Christy Peterson, Tweets & Tree Frogs, WA
Debbie Roberts, Garden of Possibilities, CT
Ellen Sousa, *The Green Garden*, MA
Emily Debolt, Fiddlehead Creek , NY
Ginny Stibolt, *Sustainable Gardening for FL*
Heather Holm, Restoring the Landscape, MN
Jacqueline Soule, Gardening with Soule, AZ
Janet Harrison, The Local Scoop, Canada

© 2011 - 2013 Carole Sevilla Brown

ABOUT US

Can Gardeners Really Make a Difference for a Healthy Planet?

> Now, for the first time in its history, gardening has taken on a role that transcends the needs of the gardener.
>
> Like it or not, gardeners have become important players in the management of our nation's wildlife. It is now within the power of individual gardeners to do something that we all dream of doing: to "make a difference."
> ~Douglas Tallamy, Bringing Nature Home

Yes!

We have come together from all over North America, book authors, professors, writers, landscape designers, biologists, gardeners, photographers, and more to say:

"Yes, We Can!"

…Read More

Site Managed by Carole Sevilla Brown of Ecosystem Gardening

Design: Pamela Wilson, Big Brand System

THE TEAM

Kathy Settevendemie, Blackfoot Nursery, MT
Kelly Brenner, Metropolitan Field Guide, WA
Kevin J Railsback, Filmmaking Naturally, IA
Kevin Songer, Living Green Roofs, FL
Loret T. Setters, Osceola FL Blah Blah Blog, FL
Mark Turner, *Wildflowers Pacific NW*, WA
Pat Sutton, *Birds and Birding at Cape May*, NJ
Steven Paulsen, Conservation Seeding & Restoration, ID
Sue Reed, *Energy-Wise Landscape Design*, MA
Susan J. Tweit, *Walking Nature Home*, CO
Susan Wittig Albert, Lifescapes, TX
Suzanne Dingwell, Clean Green Natives, VA
Tony McGuigan, *Habitat it & They Will Come*, CA
Ursula Vernon, Squash's Garden, NC
Vincent Vizachero, Roland Park Native, MD