



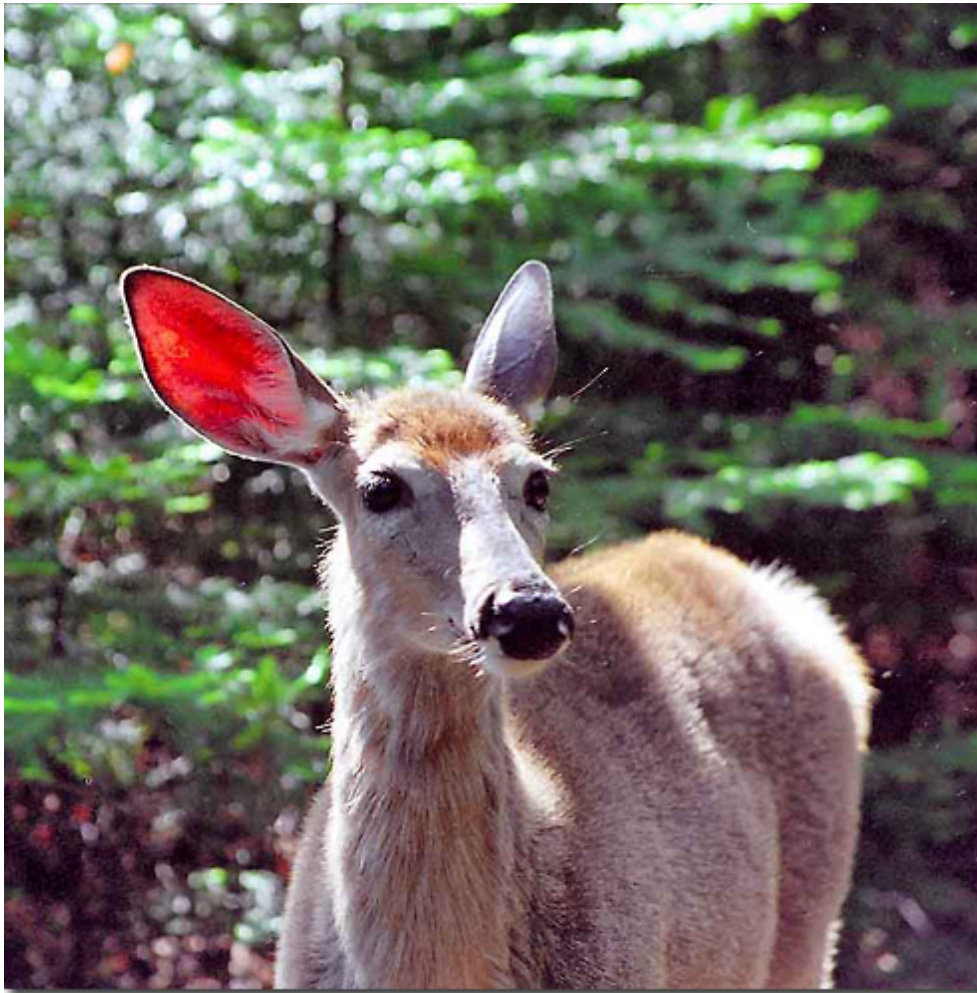
The Encounter

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It's early June 1997. My wife and I are walking along a trail in Maine's Baxter State Park. As we round a bend, there's a mama deer and her wobbly fawn, so close I can reach out and touch them both.

I know critters in state parks are protected and are used to seeing people. But a mama deer with a little one so young allowing that close an approach? I don't know?

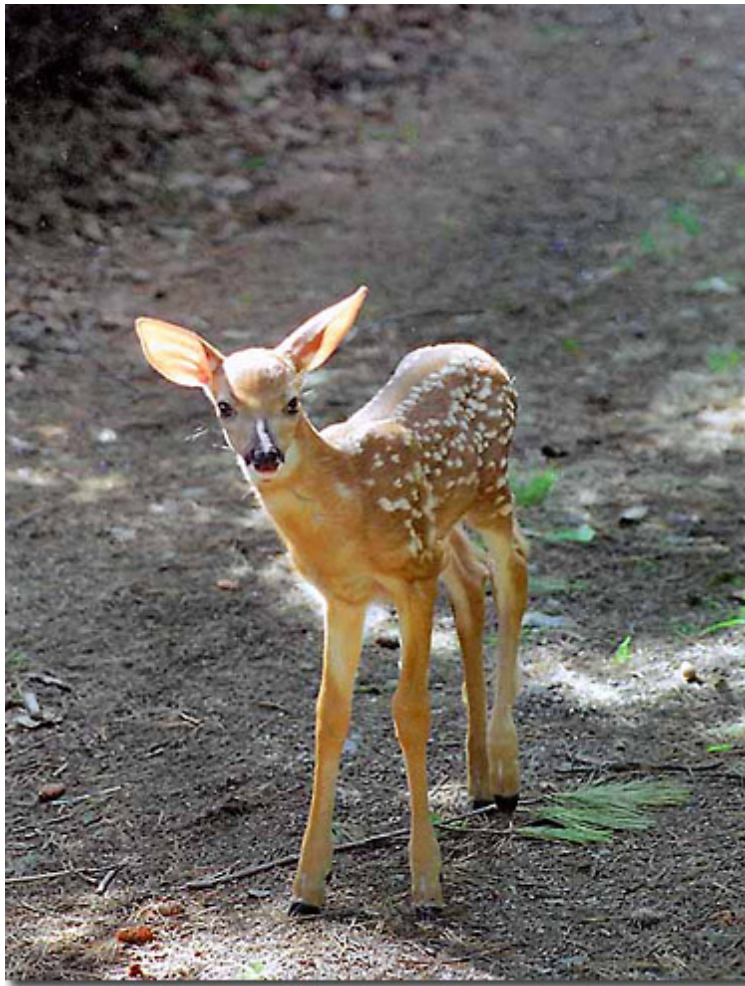
It takes me a couple of seconds to recover from the surprise but as soon as I do, I start talking to them.



"Hello. How are you? It's ok. We're not going to hurt you." They may not have understood my words, but I'm sure they understood my tones.

They're vocalizing too with soft *uckh uckh* sounds passing between them. The impression I got is that mama was reassuring the little one that all was well and there was nothing to fear.

At some point I realize I'm blocking their way. I move aside so they can pass. The doe just stands there looking at me.



I'm 6 feet tall. That puts my eyes somewhere in the vicinity of 5and1/2 feet or so off the ground. The doe's eyes are somewhere in the vicinity of 4 feet off the ground, so she has to look up slightly to see my face. I drop down to one knee bringing my eyes more on a level with hers, and stretch out a hand to her. Why? I don't know. I just do it.

What happens next is something I'll remember with wonder for as long as I live.

The doe, unhesitatingly and deliberately, takes a step (yes we were that close) forward and starts licking the back of my hand. She then, equally unhesitatingly and deliberately, turns to the fawn, and starts licking about its head and face. She does this not once, but twice. I'm stunned.

I've replayed it many times in my mind since then, trying to understand it.



Why? Why such a departure from normal behavior (as I understand it), and why so deliberate? I keep coming back to the same conclusion.

I know it's a stretch, and if I'm guilty of too much anthropomorphizing, so be it. I apologize. But it's the only thing that makes any sense.

1997 was a wet year at Baxter. Mosquitoes and Black Flies were out in force, and tormenting the little fawn. Could it be that mama was somehow aware that a substance (100% Deet), on my skin, kept most (if not all) of the Mosquitoes and Black Flies at bay and was trying to get some of that substance for her baby?

As I said, it's a stretch. But in the words of a famous fictional detective, "When you've eliminated all other possibilities, what remains, however implausible it may seem, must be the answer".



Note: Fast forward to July of 2010. We recently had dinner with a couple we met on one of our trips, and recounted the story to them. The wife half of that couple came up with another (perhaps more plausible) explanation for the doe's behavior. One that I hadn't even thought of (too stunned and/or wrapped up with the black flies and mosquitoes). It's very possible that we were the first human critters the fawn had seen. The mother's action of first licking my hand then licking about the head and face of the little one, may well have been simply her way of introducing humans to her baby. Either way. It was (and still is), one of the most incredible wildlife encounters, we've ever experienced.

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Brooklyn NY based **Ezra (Izzy) and Carolyn Schultz** took early retirement to pursue their passion for photography and travel. Their most recent publishing credit at Nature Photographers.Net was "Eden Below The Equator" in the February 2010. They maintain a website at www.naturalworldandfarawayplaces.com.

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