

BackTrails

Perspectives on People and Nature

John Bulmer

Last Day by Thomas Adessa

The old tree stand creaked and groaned in cadence with my knees as I climbed up for an afternoon sit; we have aged together. I hoped the impending snowstorm would put the deer into an early feeding mode.

“Would I finally fill a tag today?” I thought. The entire season had been fruitless; it was either too warm or too windy, and then there were the two misses. But I remained optimistic, looking forward to venison sausage and making chili during the winter.

As I settled in, I scanned the familiar woodlot for any activity. My thoughts drifted back to the years of hunts from that stand. I wondered what stories the metal and fabric would tell, if only they could talk. My thoughts whirled: “How many deer pass by in the night? How big is that buck rubbing on that beech tree? Is this where the coyotes howl after sunset?”

Memories of past wildlife encounters came to mind as I waited. I smiled, thinking about the chickadee that landed on my shooting rail; he was just curious about the big lump high up in a tree. Or, when I drew on a buck on an opening day of archery season, a coyote slinked past upwind and spooked him. And that time a Cooper’s hawk flew back and forth, scolding me; his piercing cry alerted the entire woodlot to my presence. A fluffy red fox once curled up and slept in the morning sunlight, not twenty yards away; his red fur had glistened with golden highlights.

“Wait! What was that? A deer?” No; the crunch in the dry leaves was just another squirrel stocking up on beechnuts from under the leaf litter. His presence reminded me of a family of five raccoons that feasted on the nuts earlier in the season. One of the raccoons sat on his haunches; his fat belly and pose reminded me of a Buddha statue.

My watch showed 30 minutes of legal shooting time left. It was the magical time when the deer trickle through that finger of woods to feed in a nearby corn field. “Would tonight be one of those times?” I thought. The last few minutes passed much too quickly and it was time to call it a season. The cold had made me stiff and I stood up to stretch. A sharp “whoosh” cut the stillness; antlers flashed as a buck snorted and trotted away. His tail rocked back and forth, as if giving me a white “goodbye” salute. He had been standing 50 yards away in a thicket, waiting for darkness. I smiled, shaking my head and unloading my gun. I thought, “That’s not the first time I have seen that on the last day.”

Thomas Adessa is a central New York native and an avid lover of the outdoors.

Edward Jakubowski

