

Back Trails

Perspectives on People and Nature

Bjørnen Drikker Vann (The bear drinks water)

BY DAVE NELSON

I've heard that people can be divided into three groups when it comes to coping with COVID's work-from-home restrictions: bakers, workout-aholics, and gardeners. I don't bake, and I'm a softie when it comes to the rabbits, deer, and woodchucks with whom we share our rural property. Those baby woodchucks are so darn cute, after all!

So I decided to do something different with my commuting time savings: I took up Norwegian.

Early each day, while the house is quiet, I spend a little quality time outside with hot coffee and an online app. The app asks me to translate simple sentences: *Drikker bjørnen vann?* "Does the bear drink water?" I type. *Ding*, indicating a correct answer. *Et elg er et dyr.* "A moose is an animal." *Ding*.

As the saying goes, for every cloud there's a silver lining. During our COVID isolation, we've had incredible wildlife sightings. My "home office" overlooks a 15-acre pond; there's always something good to see. And this year, we're home to see it.

Muskrats are a daily occurrence; beavers come and go; and deer are quite common—does, fawns, and the occasional buck splash in the shallows. The bird life is great and varied: male wood ducks preen their beautiful feathers while females raise their broods, little ones in tow, as if

on a string. Great blue and green herons stalk the shorelines. Masked male yellowthroats sing "witchity witchity" from the shrubs, while catbirds mew. Phoebes hawk insects from their perches, and harriers and accipiters make occasional flyovers, momentarily silencing birdlife. Kingfishers rattle; an osprey and even a bald eagle occasionally fish the pond. Snapping turtles vie for

dominance, and watersnakes swim from one shore to the other. Being home this year makes us realize just how much we usually miss.

Once in a while, we have a truly exceptional sighting. Occasionally, we see otters—this year we saw an adult with two little ones. Their antics and energy abound and are always enjoyable. A bobcat came to visit the pond early this spring—it sat on its haunches under a tree for protection from a drizzling rain, while we watched with binoculars.

Still, we have not seen a moose. (*Vi ser ikke en elg.* "We do not see a moose.")

Just last week, while I was on a call with a colleague, a big black shape materialized from the cattails at the far end of the pond. As it came into



the open, I could see it was a large bear. It lowered its head, took a drink from the pond, and slipped back into the reeds as quickly as it arrived.

And then I realized, I had my answer to the question posed earlier by the app: *Drikker bjørnen vann?* "Does the bear drink water?" *Ja, bjørnen drikker vann.* "Yes, the bear drinks water." *Ding!*

I guess it's true: you're never too old to learn—and I also learned you can *ha det gøy* ("have fun") while doing it.

Someday, *kanskje vi ser en elg.* ("Maybe we'll see a moose.")

With apologies to native Norwegian speakers, former *Conservationist* editor **Dave Nelson** feeds cottontail rabbits lettuce, beans, and pepper plants when he tries to garden in rural Albany County.