

Animals' behavior foretold weekend storm

by MICHAEL P. JONES

There was a feeling in the mountain range of the rough-cut land of many streams and high canyon walls that seemed to sheer the south distance from the north.

It was November 13, just half past midnight and a good start into the bewitched Friday the Thirteenth, when I felt it.

The apprehension was beginning to grow and eat away at my instincts, warning me of what was to come.

My companion and I moved cautiously down the muddy trail, but the apprehension continued and threatened to shatter the eerie silence that greeted us in this land that is accessible only to wildlife and the familiar.

It wasn't the rain that fell cold around us. Nor was it the icy chill of the wind that pierced our clothing and added a chill to our blood. No, the apprehension was more than this, and different from the feelings of the darkness that challenged and beckoned us to enter the unnamed canyon of the bears.

As we entered the sanction of the rugged trail, overgrown with alders and overrun (in part) by newly-formed rain water streams, our thoughts were divided between what lay ahead and the intensity of knowing something was happening concerning the unpredictable nature of the Oregon weather.

As my old pickup came to an abrupt halt in a grassy landing that once served as a "cold deck" of a now-forgotten logging operation of the 50s, not even the familiar call of a night bird broke the stillness of the air. Something was wrong. The rains stopped and a nearly-full moon, still hidden behind the cover of the

clouds, illuminated the way.

Eyes adjusting to the dark, we trudged ahead toward our destination, to a place where the bears feed in the safety of the moon-lit darkness.

This is game country at the edge of night, and it could perhaps even pass for the far end of the earth, since nothing stirred except our boots, trudging through the grass, and the wind, moving through the trees.

Thirty minutes later we cautiously crossed an old log bridging a creek that split a lush meadow between the east and the west. The moon began to penetrate the clouds even more as we ventured ahead, aiding our passage to a lush feeding area that lay somewhere ahead.

Coyotes called to one another from the canyon's walls; their cries echoing far into the distance, but like us, moving closer to the same destination.

Moments later we stood overlooking the feeding area where wildlife ventures after leaving the security of the brush where they have bedded down during the day. Oddly enough, no bears were in sight.

In the twilight, another coyote's cry sliced through the night's air. A freeze in our tracks. Something cried back. Whatever made the noise was moving down a small waterfall, only a hundred yards away. It was a bobcat crying and snarling in the silence of the meadow. Again, we were overtaken by the feeling that something was wrong.

The mountain cat moved down among a dense tangle of blackberry vines, bracken ferns and rotted logs, making its way into the openness of the meadow. It bellowed out a

cry and then stood its ground, listening to the rhythms of the wind. Quickly, it made a solitary retreat and scampered back up the hillside to higher ground.

A deer moved uneasily through the underbrush. Again, the coyotes called from the outlying steep terrain, as if to warn all to take shelter in the rocks for a coming storm.

We cautiously surveyed the meadow. Still no bears were in sight. We retreated, moving quickly over a patchwork of moss and lichens that carpeted the waterlogged trail that lead to our escape vehicle.

Something was coming. The weather was changing. Like the wildlife, we could sense it by listening to the movements in the night.

Once to the truck our get-a-way was quick, until we reached the head of the canyon. Storm or no storm, the temptation to walk among the bears oertook us once again. We came to a stop and headed back into a thick clump of woods that spanned the horizon just east of the canyon.

The going was tricky as we followed the trail farther up into the trees, and it occasionally disappeared among the camouflage of brambles, and slash from

former logging days. By the time we would find the trail again, we would find ourselves even deeper into the hills near the rocks, going the same direction as the game.

Deeper and deeper we penetrated—over logs and through streams that seemed to mask the direction from which we came. The wind picked up and the rains started to fall. The bobcat screamed. Deer moved nervously through the alders. We retreated. The bears were nowhere in sight. A storm was blowing in.

Once back down in the low country, where the

small mountain towns scatter their domain along the Mt. Hood corridor, the setting was different. Gone was the haunting apprehension. Gone was the warning feeling that nature was about to unleash its fury in the form of a storm. It was 4 a.m., cold and wet. A time to retire to our homes for some "shut-eye."

At 5:30 p.m., 13 and a half hours later, the first gusts of wind came as if to scout the countryside, which the storm would hit. But it wasn't until nine and half hours after this that the lights went out and threw the mountain community

back into the past, to a time when electricity was nonexistent.

It was like being up in the canyon, where the silence dominates the darkness. The only difference was the

apprehension of something coming—the storm warning—was removed. The storm had finally hit. The flatlands felt its fury the most; the mountain, for some reason, was left relatively untouched.

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Update to be given on juvenile services

The Clackamas County Juvenile Services Commission will hold a public meeting on Dec. 15 at 7 p.m. at the Clackamas County Court House.

In addition to routine business, a report will be made by Ellen N. Bergmark, evaluation design consultant, who will give an update on the progress of the Juvenile Services Commission programs.

RNG to meet on Nov. 28

The Rhododendron Neighborhood Group will meet on Nov. 28 at 3 p.m. at the home of Wendell Tobey.

The agenda is to include discussion of a hydroelectric project on Henry Creek and a committee report on a visit with Ardis Stevenson, county coordinator.

RNG meetings are open to anyone living in the Rhododendron, Woodlands or Faubion areas. For further information call 622-3486.

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