

## Me and a Buck.

My neighbor and his wife moved here full-time a year before I did, so he was already feeding some deer when I arrived. Occasionally, when he was out of feed or sleeping late, a deer or more would wander over to my place, and I'd feed them a little of what I had. This has gone on for over seven years now. These deer do not migrate out of here during the winter because their mother never taught them how to migrate. She never got to teach them about migration because her mother had gotten killed before teaching her. Subsequently, her progeny didn't learn to migrate either, enabling a trend that continued with the fawns she bore.

The first doe had two males one year; another year, her only fawn was a female who got hit by a car and died. The first doe is no longer here, so the herd that didn't migrate was down to four males, one of which got hit by a car and died recently. I believed the trend was stopping until a young doe arrived last autumn, and she didn't migrate. I don't know why she didn't, but I suppose her mother got killed, too. That newly arrived doe is now pregnant, so it appears the trend of non-migration will continue.

This winter, I noticed one of the bucks behaving aggressively towards the other deer in the herd. While aggressiveness among bucks is not unusual, it caught my attention because his aggression was unusually intense. One day, several months ago, while I was feeding three bucks and a doe, the aggressive buck stomped a front hoof on the ground right in front of me. That gesture is highly aggressive and implies dominance.

I loudly said to the buck, "Don't you fucking do that to me! I'll put you in my freezer if you ever hurt me!" He backed away, and we've been okay since. I'm quite sure he's been wondering what a freezer is.

Today, while I was changing the critter's water bowl, four deer arrived, and although it's late spring, I decided to give them a little treat. As I was pouring out half tins of feed to share between them, a buck walked up to me. I was bent over and not paying much attention when he kicked the tin I was holding out of my hand. Now, I'm a peace and love guy, but without a thought or even a second passing, I had punched him right on his wet nose. He backed away, and the other deer stopped eating and were watching us both.

I shouted at him, "Don't you act like that toward me!" We all stood there watching each other, and after a minute, things calmed down. I walked slowly toward him, offering the tin that still had a small amount of feed in it. He slowly walked up to me without any fear and ate what was in the tin until I poured the rest out on the ground, in a small pile, in front of him, and I walked away.

An aggressive buck without fear of humans is one to watch and to be careful around. His antlers are still covered in velvet, so there are no sharp points, but I will stop feeding this small herd now. When the doe comes alone, as she sometimes does, then I'll feed her.

Life is all fun and games until it's not.

Written by Peter Skeels © 6-3-2024