

7/3/55

Along The Trail

by
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"May 3 was the time of an important event. On this morning when early shadows were filtering through the pines, I interrupted the first walk of two tiny fawns and their mother. She crossed the road and entered the pines. Close behind, in single file, came the youngsters, not over a day old, rubber-legged and wobbly. Sunbeams highlighted their spots as they paused, uncertain what to do. The mother perked up her ears, looked inquiringly toward me, then walked to the cover of small, close-set trees. One fawn staggered after her, the other dropped into the grass and disappeared.

"Rather than disturb them further, I withdrew quietly, but not soon enough to escape a feeling of great esthetic pleasure. This feeling, which wells up inside me whenever I see more than the commonplace things of

nature, the feeling which is reserved for special occasions, is akin to that which every person experiences when he is deeply impressed by some incident of the wild. At times like this, we know why there must be places, not merely set aside, but forever protected from intrusion, where we can all go and see and become enriched."

The preceding is taken from my notes of two years ago and indicates that, although I appreciate venison as much as the next man, I also believe in keeping a part of the wild animal population in areas where they are protected and where they can be enjoyed by everyone.

The coast blacktail deer produce their fawns in May and June when the females steal away into some sequestered part of the woods. If the mother is a young deer, only one

fawn will arrive, but twins are usually born after the first year and sometimes triplets.

At birth the fawns are hidden by the mother in tall grass, ferns or ~~the~~ plants and lie still as though they were dead. At such times they are exceedingly difficult to see, their spotted brown coats serving to make them resemble a sun-dappled log, and so motionless do they remain that a man can walk up to them and touch them with his foot.

Their young bodies have not yet developed the odor-producing glands which form part of the signal system of adult deer. Fawns are believed to be odorless, for hunters tell of dogs passing within a few feet of them and never being aware of their presence.

The mother comes to feed her young several times a day, and when not actually with the fawn is usually standing guard nearby.

In the fall the pelage changes, and the spots are exchanged for a coat of uniform gray or tan. Fawns run with their mothers all summer until the mating season begins. The young are then driven off by the mother, who becomes interested in acquiring a mate.

People commonly see fawns and, because the mother is not in sight, assume the young are lost. The fawns are not lost and should never be molested, for the mother is nearby, but often too shy to make her appearance. Picking up fawns may prove to be dangerous, for all mothers may not be shy and may attack the kidnaper. Do not pick up fawns and take them to a ranger or warden because you want to help the poor orphans. The best way to help them is to leave them alone.

It is common belief that one should not touch the scentless young, because human scent upon the fawn will serve to attract predators to it. Likewise, it is believed that the mother will not accept her baby if it carries human scent. Whether this is true or not, I do not know.

Dear Me! What Are You After?

