

HEADS UP! .....NO, HEADS DOWN!

On my morning walk I cross the Covered Bridge and take the path that goes down the hill along the river. Hemlocks cover the bank there and underneath the trees is a carpet of stripped pinecones and pine nut seeds, left by red and grey squirrels. I've never seen them there but the evidence of major feeding is undeniable.

Our dog Lucy and I follow the path down along the river to a favorite stopping point where there is a nice variety of trees standing together; an oak, a maple, a sycamore, cherry, white pine and hemlock. We stop there so Lucy can have a swim and I scoop up a splash of Beaverkill water.

We often see eagles. There is a pair that flies up and down the river corridor, sometimes together and sometimes alone. The blue heron also flies up this corridor, seeming to be on the way to someplace else but Ross Francis has seen a heron's in the hemlock forest there. Occasionally there are black ducks, as well as mallards and mergansers. John also saw otter playing by the Covered Bridge earlier this summer. Over the years I've seen mink racing up and down the riverbank. Once I saw an eel that was out of the water and still alive but clearly in trouble. Either a martin or a weasel was nearby –

waiting for me to get out of the way so she could finish her hunt. As tempting as it was to try and get the eel back in the water, I decided not to interfere with nature and moved on.

There is ample evidence of beavers getting ready for the winter up in our little pond as well as up and down the river. In the past I've wrote about the big "Mama" spider who built her nest in the fall to protect her eggs at campsite # 74.

Does all this activity by wild animals (Including deer devastating everything growing in our yard and dozens of mice moving into every cabinet and drawer they can find) mean we will have an especially hard winter? We'll see soon enough.

This walk often gives me the opportunity for a morning visit with Joan Obecnny and her dog Heidi. Joan was practicing for her five-hundred mile pilgrimage walk "The Way of St James" from France to Santiago Del Compestala in Spain. She was building up to 10-18 miles a day to be prepared. In addition to her walk along the river she also walked up beyond Judy Rosen's house on Berry Brook. There, she saw what she first thought was a bear crossing the road. But as she focused, she saw it move very differently from a bear, had a long curved tail and the head was down – all pointing to the possibility that she saw a large black cat. Judy Rosen also saw a black cat near her house in 2004. Obviously Joan experienced no harm from the

cat and is now a week away from completing her pilgrimage walk.

One of the most interesting things I've seen this fall are the multiple mushrooms, particularly after the rains we had in August. I first noticed them scattered up the bank under the hemlocks.

These amazing plants push up through clay soil, rocks, dense pine needles and grass. The strength it must take to push up this way, and yet they are so ephemeral. I tried to keep track of their longevity but it was hard to be exactly sure how many had disappeared and how many and sprung up. Mushrooms seem extraordinarily vulnerable and easily disturbed, by animals, walkers – or just seem to grow up and 'explode.

The variety of mushrooms is astounding with an enormous array of colors. The different shapes are subtler, but I found it hard to find the same mushroom in different places. Each variety seems to have its own special place.

Pat Root walked with me on afternoon as we looked for mushrooms. I didn't know the names or which are edible of any of them so she sent me a book on mushrooms that answered my questions.. Here are a couple of quotes from the book.

“Mushrooms are among the most mysterious life forms. The ancient Greeks believed they came from Zeus’s lightning because they appeared after rains. In the Middle Ages, mushrooms were dubbed “fairy rings”, the work of the “little people”.

Mushrooms appear suddenly and often in places where they have never been seen before. They have, in fact, been out of sight, growing underground or beneath bark.

Mushrooms reproduce by producing millions of spores that are dispersed in various ways.”

Looking for the variety and number of mushroom just in an half mile walk along the river is fun. Looking down for these wonderful hidden creatures reminds me of hunting Easter Eggs as a child.

Now with fall here and the leaves changing, it is time for HEADS UP! as we watch for the brilliant colors against an autumn sky.

Patricia Adams