



Bowen Island Undercurrent - Opinion

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Deer in the headlights

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July is the month when we first see this year's fawns moving about. I will never forget my first sight of spotted fawns in July of 2007, soon after we moved to Bowen. I couldn't believe my eyes: a pair of twins with their mum, grazing on the rock outcrop just a few feet from our deck. What a privilege! And those spotted fawns were almost too good to be true. The lines of dots along their backs made them look just like Bambi.

Fawns are usually born in June and for the first few weeks, they stay hidden in the undergrowth, camouflaged by their spotted hides, while mum goes off to forage. Being a herbivore is very labour intensive and to get enough nutrients, deer have to graze for many hours per day. A lactating doe will need even more nutrients and that's why she must go off and eat her fill. The new fawns are well adapted to being left on their own. They emit no odour and they stay very still. This reduces the chances of predators finding them.

It's important to know that if you find a baby fawn, you should leave her be. The doe will be back before long. Try not to disturb her, and do everything you can to keep dogs away from the area. This is the time of year when we dog-owners need to make a special effort to keep our dogs leashed. Even the least aggressive of dogs, when unleashed and running free, can attack a baby deer with fatal consequences.

Soon the fawns will start to learn how to graze alongside their mothers. This means that we will see them at the sides of the road. It takes some time for the new fawns to get a little world-wise and traffic-wise, so we drivers all need to exercise extra caution for the next month or so, especially at known deer crossings and at dusk. Many of the regular deer crossings are marked by signs erected by the municipality. One of the busiest is on the cross-island road, in the S-bend between the building centre and the garden centre. That's a good place to watch your speed and to be extra vigilant for deer. There are plenty on Miller Road too. And it's good to remember that the deer move around in family groups of mothers and offspring at this time, so if you see one deer, there are usually others nearby.

You may remember the signs created by CAWES (Coast Animal Welfare & Education Society) a few years ago about leaving baby deer and baby seals alone. That's right – the same goes for seal pups too. It's a mistake to assume that a seal pup on his own has been abandoned. His mother may just be away hunting.

Earlier this year, as reported by the Undercurrent in April, Island Pacific School student Isabella Perroni lobbied BIM council to put up signage informing the public what to do upon finding a baby seal. This excellent initiative came from her Masterworks project on marine mammals. Since then, she has worked closely with bylaw officer Bonny Brokenshire. New signs will go up soon at the beaches currently with no signage. Posters giving the same information will be displayed on the ferry.

What we can learn is that the best thing to do when dealing with wild animals is sometimes nothing at all.

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