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by Hope Sawyer Buyukmihci

“Springtime! Lovetime! May!” Sexults the old song, and it’s true in the wildlife world, though many animals mated during the bitter days of mid-winter or early spring. Horned owls, whose blended voices were heard in January and February, may have young out of the nest. Bluebirds nested when dogwoods began to bloom and in May are feeding first broods.

Here is an account of how Shelley Tyre, a volunteer at Unexpected Wildlife Refuge, became friendly with a mother beaver named October, who later allowed Shelley to feed her kittens: “Her wet black nose came nearer to my outstretched fingers. Her big brown eyes never left my face. I was trembling inside, but I kept up a steady barrage of talk, probably calming myself more than her.

she whom I know best. Lying on a wooden platform to be nearer beaver height, I read to her by the hour. She must be one of the best educated beavers around, for she’s heard parts of Wolfe’s *Look Homeward, Angel*, Kerouac’s *On the Road* and many others. At first, she would cautiously eat popular leaves as far away from me as possible. Gradually she gained confidence, until she was coming

BEAVERTIME

Wood ducks looked for hollow-tree sites as early as February, and the mothers may be leading their young up and down wooded streams.

Above all, May is Beavertime. Beaver kittens are born about May 1 in my New Jersey area. Both mother and father care for the young, one always staying at the lodge while the other goes out to work or eat. At two weeks of age the young are ready to venture out of the lodge. At that time the parents, yearlings or two-year-olds teach them to hold their breath for the dive into the inside pool and to swim out and up to the surface in a pond made wide and deep by the beavers’ dam.

Beaver kits nurse for about two months, but they begin to eat solid food while still in the lodge. This food consists of tender leaves and twigs and stems of swamp grass brought in, underwater, by their parents.

Beavertime occurs in the evening when parents and young emerge from their lodge and come to take food provided by their human friends. If parent beavers have learned through long experience to trust these humans, they let their kits approach without fear.



Then, with delicate grace, she took the apple from my hand.

That was the first time October had honored me with her trust and although she’s eaten from my hand many times since, the thrill has never left.

It all started a little over two months ago. We’d been putting poplar out beyond the boardwalk, but we never saw any beavers there, until one night . . . and that was the beginning. I decided to go up there every evening. I discovered there were three beavers: October is the mother and the biggest; Lenape is her mate, wary and seldom seen; Sprite is about a half-size beaver, a yearling, and very cute.

Since October is the greediest and chases the others away, it’s

to within a foot of me. And it never fails to thrill me when I feel her wet nose against my hand and then watch while she eats with dainty fingers.

I think the thing that’s made me happiest is that she’s given me her trust. Me, a member of the race that has tried so desperately to wipe out this living personality. I feel very undeserving of her trust, as long as our motto, “They shall never be trapped anymore,” remains unfulfilled.

But I feel thankful, too. October has given me trust in return for my simple gift of kindness, and shown me what real beauty is. If only man would let the beaver teach him, these values would be saved from extinction.”

