

Farm Tales

Beavers Moving In



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Dear Reader

Most of the BOLDER Farm Tales begin in the morning. I guess it's because I love mornings, and it's when I get most of my work done for the day. After lunch time, I have to really watch what I do. For example, if I need to write or come up with a really smart plan to make something, it won't come as easily to me as it might if I did the task in the morning.

And if you have been reading Farm Tales, you know that my friend, the little red-tailed squirrel—who remarkably can talk—often makes an appearance on days when there is a red sky in the morning. So when there is a red sky morning, I usually get pretty excited about what will come, and I get ready for an adventure.

Today was very different. My morning was mostly spent doing chores related to feeding and caring for our critters and making sure pipes in the barn weren't freezing. For the last two weeks, it has been VERY cold. Our little valley points to the north, and sometimes it can feel like the wind is coming right from the North Pole!

Instead of my chores taking a little bit of time, it seemed like the whole morning was spent putting out bird seed, giving hay to the goats and horses, and keeping the water troughs from freezing. Doors have to be kept shut, and electric heaters to go into the water troughs have to be plugged in. By lunch time, I was cold and hungry. And a very big serving of hot soup was followed by a nap in my reading chair.

I woke up from my afternoon nap a little disoriented. It is very rare that I take a nap, and immediately I jumped out of my chair and looked outside. The wintry white snow in the afternoon light looked as pretty as a postcard. That's an old-fashioned expression that my dad used to say... *"as pretty as a postcard."* I have always thought that it means very pretty! Anyway, I hadn't seen my friend, the little red-tailed squirrel, in a few days, and I imagined he was cuddled up in the barn or in the shed, staying warm and out of the cold weather. So I bundled up in my warm outside clothes and went to look for him. I looked in the barn. No little red-tailed squirrel. I looked in the shed. No little red-tailed squirrel. I walked up the hill to the grove of walnut trees. No little red-tailed squirrel.

Before I could even start to worry, I looked down by the stream and saw a red-tailed flash!

"There he is!" I said out loud and headed down the hill towards the stream. He saw me coming and ran towards me. His tail was waving as he made his long jumps in the snow.

"You're never going to believe it!" he said. "Of course, maybe you will believe it. But I didn't believe it until I investigated it for myself. They are changing everything up there in the north end. I mean, I've never seen anything like it in my whole life. From one day to the next, everything absolutely changed! And the trees! They are cutting down all the trees! Of course not the trees that I like very much, but the Hawthornes and the black willows, just"

"Whoa, there! Catch your breath! What are you talking about?" I asked. He was out of breath from running through the snow and the excitement about what he was telling me.

"I'm ok, everything is really just fine," he said. I am sure he had seen the alarm in my face. He continued, "It's just that I met new folks down by the stream and I can't even believe it!"

"What can't you believe?" He was starting to catch his breath and looked a little frazzled. And then I saw his big smile, and immediately I felt better. If you've never seen a squirrel smile, it is really quite a sight. First, you can see their eyes start to sparkle, and then their nose wrinkles, and you can actually see a bit of a toothy grin.

"The new folks are BEAVERS!" he exclaimed.



“You are kidding! Beavers?! There haven’t been beavers here at the farm for more than 30 years!” I said.

And I could tell now why he was smiling. He really loves it when he can tell me something I never could have guessed!

“Where? Let’s go see!” I hoped my friend, the little red-tailed squirrel, wasn’t too cold to show me.

“I knew you would want to go see them! Can I hitch a ride?”

Before I could even respond, he leapt up on my coat and scrambled up on my left shoulder. Ever since our walk in the rain last fall, he has jumped, quite literally, at the chance to ride on my shoulder.

“You won’t believe what they are building! And already there is a pond where there just used to be a stream!” he said.

When sitting on my shoulder, my little friend, the red-tailed squirrel, is careful to talk softly because he’s so close to my ear. Although he was speaking softly, I could hear the excitement in his voice. And then he started chuckling...

“Heeheehe! When I found out the beaver family had moved in, I skeedaddled right over, and I made the bestest friend! I mean, Ink is like my real bestest friend, but Beaver is so much fun. And so silly! He’s a beaver about my age. He has a sister and a brother who are his age. His younger brothers and sisters (they are called kits) are so so cute! Don’t tell Ink, but they are really as cute as kittens!”

Ink, the sleek, black barn cat, is his best friend. And he’s right, Ink would not think anything is as cute as kittens.

“He kind of whistles through his teeth when he talks. He just cracks me up!” he continued. “He says, ‘Surely Sycamore bark is scrumpdillitious!’ “Heeheehe!”

“I met his dad and mom a couple of times,” he continued. “They are super nice, moved here because of all the sycamores and black willows along the stream. His dad is always scribbling down tree measurements and doing calculations. They are chewing down bunches of trees. Beaver said that they hope to have a really big pond by next summer.”

“They sound like they are very busy beavers!” I said.

“And you should see him swim! Even with a big branch in his mouth. And his whole family lives in a lodge made of sticks and mud. He asked me to visit, but I would have had to go into the water to get in, and NO THANKS about getting into the icy stream. No Thanks! He said that once you dive into the water, you can see the tunnel that goes into the lodge. There is sort of a mudroom with fresh wood chips to help dry the beavers off when they come into the lodge. And then, he said, you go up to the upper room where there is plenty of room for the whole family. There are nine of them! And they store branches in the water and in their lodge, so they eat the bark off. When they have eaten the bark, which by the way I think would not be nearly as good as nuts!, then they take the bare stick and put it on top of their lodge. They use mud to build the base of the lodge, but not at the top. That lets in fresh air in their upper room. Aren’t they smart?”



“There is so much to learn about beavers!” I said, chuckling to myself because he was so excited to share all he had learned.

dam

“And there’s more! They have built dams in the stream. They made one part of the stream a pretty big pond, but then upstream, there are a few more dams. Mr. Beaver, my friend’s dad, said it is to take the pressure off of the big dam so that if there is a big rain or when all this snow melts, it won’t wash away. Clever, right? And you should see some of the big trees they are chewing down! I mean, some of the trees are huge! And that’s why I said that it is amazing how everything looks so different. My friend is very proud of all their hard work. He said that pretty soon there will be ducks making their spring nest around the pond and that there might even be big fish! Can you believe it?”

At this point, we rounded the bend in the stream, and I came face-to-face with the big dam built into the stream! And above the dam was a pond where there had been a meandering stream. (Meandering means that the stream was curvy and not in a straight line.)

Although not huge, the new pond was about the size of a full basketball court, and on the northern edge, there was a mound that I knew was the beaver lodge. Like everything on this icy and snowy day, the lodge was mostly white with only a few sticks on the top poking through the snow.

“Whhhaaapp!” I jumped at the sound of the slap. It made me jump and made my friend, the little red-tailed squirrel, clutch at my shoulder!

“That’s Mr. Beaver’s alarm! He is always on alert about any strangers coming around the dams and the lodge and slaps his big flat tail on the water to warn the family. That’s his signal for his family to dive in and get back to the lodge. Mr. Beaver can be pretty no-nonsense. My friend the beaver said even if he’s in the middle of chewing down a tree, he has to stop right away and get back to the lodge. That’s why they really don’t work until it is almost evening, and then they work through most of the night. They can work without being bothered.”

We stood at the edge of the new pond and looked at the engineering marvel of the dam the beavers had built. A stillness had settled in over the place. You could hear the trickling of water through the dam, and a barred owl hooted up in the woods.

My friend, the little red-tailed squirrel, huddled a little closer at the sound of the owl.

“Don’t you think we need to get back to the barn?” he asked a little sheepishly. “I mean, the beavers are in their lodge, and it’s not like they are going to come out and say hello...”

“I think it’s getting late, too,” I said. “We’ll head back, but I am sure glad you told me about the beavers and shared so much about what you have learned!”

As we trudged back to the barn through the snow, I thought about how lucky I was to have my critter friends.

Have a day full of blessings,

Bron

