NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

# Not just nuisances: life lessons from deer and geese

Sharon Abercrombie | Apr. 22, 2014 Eco Catholic

The deer showed up three times last week. Being half Irish, and therefore always primed for ?signs? -- mystical or otherwise -- I suspected they had something important to say, especially so close to Earth Day.

As it turned out, they did.

In one of their appearances, the deer came as bearers of grief, arriving April 19 through a *Columbus Dispatch obituary [1]*.

The morning of Good Friday, Carol Deyo, the former surgical veterinary technician who nursed two fawns (Trooper and Patch) back to health, died from complications from breast cancer. Her care for the animals put her at risk [2] of a fourth-degree misdemeanor, but she ultimately settled her case with the Ohio Division of Wildlife, agreeing she could keep the deer if she promised not to take in more wild animals.

Earlier that same week, while walking in the woods outside our apartment complex, I watched delightedly as a deer family interacted with a human family. The critters, totally unafraid, allowed themselves to be stroked and petted. The scene was beautiful to behold.

Just two days before witnessing the woods scene, I was immersed in a class entitled ?Writing one?s EcoAutobiography,? sponsored by The Spirituality Network, an interfaith outreach organization here in Columbus.

The EcoAutobiography class, taught by the Rev. Christine Widrig, a Lutheran minister, and Sara Ward, director of Ohio Power and Light, was patterned after one of the GreenFaith [3] programs. Greenfaith, which offers a certification process [4] for turning houses of worship into environmental leaders, believes that our spirituality grows stronger when it is in relationship with nature.

In the class, we agreed that sometimes nature can be a mixed bag -- especially for serious gardeners -- and can test our patience. We traded stories about losing roses and pesky deer visitors. I thought about the Canadian geese taking over a local riverfront park.

Rev. Deb Click of the United Church of Christ offered another perspective: Don?t always regard certain animals like deer and geese as ?pests.? Overpopulation leads to both species earning such labels, she acknowledged, but both creatures, like all animals, offer to us two-leggers their own individual medicinal lessons about peaceful living upon the earth.

Deer, Click said, represent gentleness. Geese are all about living in community.

Those words remained with me after class, and I meditated on them all week. When the two deer episodes transpired within days of one another, I thought, ?Aha, synchronicity is here.?

What more could be learned from animal medicine?

Deer, according to Whats-your-sign.com [5], symbolize love, grace, peace, beauty, spirituality, benevolence and watchfulness. The website explained, at the practical level, both Native Americans and Celts ?observed the deer to be savvy when it came to finding the best herbs,? following the creatures to prime herb patches. At the spiritual level, the deer -- particularly the doe -- ?has the capacity for infinite generosity. Their heart rhythms pulse in soft waves of kindness.?

At Shamanicjourney.com, Ina Woolcott states [6] that the ?deer teaches us to be gentle, to touch the hearts and minds of wounded beings who are in our lives. Don?t push people to change, rather gently nudge them in [the] right direction.? Deer horn symbols, too, can serve [7] as powerful medicine, representing that power, determination and gentleness can co-exist.

As for those messy, noisy geese, they offer their own examples for living, particularly in their migratory habits.

?No goose is ever left to die on its own and this too is a reminder for us that we are never alone,? that if an ill or injured bird is without a mate, another goose ?will follow and remain with them until the fallen bird either recovers or die,? said Morningstar.netfirms.com [8].

Click?s observations about deer and geese resonate strongly, especially on this particular Earth Day. If there was ever a time for the resurgence of gentleness, compassion and community within the entire planetary family, this is it.

We see a need for the deer?s gentleness and determination as we peacefully protest against the Keystone XL transnational pipeline; when we push against corporate attempts to keep food ingredients off labels; when we support humane groups working to stop the slaughter of baby Canadian harp seals for their fur and African elephants for their ivory.

We need to wrap all of creation within the soft brown cloak of doe compassion.

Jesus came with his own brand of healing medicine for us. Deer and geese offer their own brand, too. As a unitive trio, they help to touch into the divine part of ourselves, the divine that fosters compassion, gentleness and community needed to heal the wounds of our earth.

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