

Trumpeter (1990)
ISSN: 0832-6193
LEAVE IT TO BEAVERS

Michael J. Cohen
World Peace University

About the Author: *Michael J. Cohen* is a professor of integrated ecology at World Peace University in Eugene, Oregon, and founder and director emeritus of the National Audubon Society Expedition Institute. He is the author of six books, including *Connecting with Nature: Creating Moments that Let Earth Teach* (1989), *How Nature Works: Regenerating Kinship with Planet Earth* (1988), *Prejudice against Nature: A Guidebook for the Liberation of Self and Planet* (1983). He organizes deep ecology wilderness trips and broadcasts courses internationally on Radio for Peace International.

Astonishment often crosses the faces of those discovering that the closest wilderness to them lies within them. Through our culturally bigoted glasses, we seldom see that biologically we are each a seamless continuum of Earth's wilderness creatures and relationships. All of our talents and attributes originally grew with and through the plant and animal community over the eons. Within us is the whale's intelligence, the coyote's persistence and the redwood's endurance. Each of our traits — kindness, sensitivity, law, honesty, courage — pervade the natural world which grew us. Yet, we seldom honour wild beings for their contribution to human being. Instead, we violate them.

As a case in point, the beaver for millions of years played its vital roles in land and water conservation. Its dams helped purify water by creating settling ponds which often became fertile meadowlands when they filled with stream-carried eroded topsoil. Fashion was the beaver's undoing. A craving for beaver hats made beaver pelts a premium to the point that the eastern beaver became virtually extinct. Shortly thereafter, erosion increase in the East became alarming. Beavers were reintroduced to the eastern USA from western populations of Yellowstone Park areas.

Although we learned an important lesson from beavers about Nature's balanced wisdom, an even greater lesson can be learned. You see, as dam and house builders, beavers actually create technologies. Unlike us, however, their technologies harmonically balance with the global life community. Their technologies and lives contribute to Earth's integrity rather than destroying it.

Unlike modern society, beavers sensibly go with the vital flow of the natural world. The environment flows in and through everything, beavers and ourselves included. Every few years over 95

If beavers could speak, they could tell us their secret to successful technological balance. As water-loving organisms, they might use water as an example. They might point out that water from the environment flows into our personal being, through us and out of us. During this process, neither an excess nor shortage of water enters or leaves us preventing water from bloating or dehydrating us, a sensitive natural regulator guides water through us.

The beavers might say that the water regulator we know best is a sensation of feeling called *thirst*. Surprised? Do not be. We often lose sight of our sense of thirst and of many other senses and feelings as well. That is because industrial society, unlike beaver society, fights an undeclared war with Nature. It thrives by demeaning, conquering and separating itself and us from Nature. *We lose sight of our senses because they are Nature*. People did not invent our sense of thirst or any other sense. Nature invented them in us and in beavers and to us Nature is the bad guy, the enemy. Senses are in Nature's camp. Most four letter swear words are Nature.

Senses, however, are life. Contrary to Descartes' "I think, therefore I am", we also know of our existence because we sense and feel. "I feel, therefore I am" makes perfect sense if you do not demean senses.

Beavers could say "Your modern bias against Nature manipulates and exploits your natural senses in order for you to create your artificial world. Sure, you applaud sight, smell, taste, touch and hearing. These senses help you change the natural world into artifacts and energy. They empower your culturally programmed domination of Nature. But thirst interferes with it. You do not control thirst, it controls you. You have yet to recognize that *for sentient beings, the feeling of thirst is as much a part of the Planet's water as is wetness*. A sentient being's thirst feelings, not mechanics, help to catalyze, regulate and balance its water relationships with Earth."

The beavers' point should be well taken. We seldom learn that *as it does every other natural sense and feeling, the global life community manifests thirst feelings to help keep Earth flowing for the community's survival*. Thirst is the water of the Planet expressing itself in us. Through thirst feelings newborns know of water's existence before they ever drink it. The sensations not only command to drink the Planet's water, but quenched thirst feelings signal when to stop drinking. *Natural sensations and feelings* connect, regulate and balance. In beavers this occurs in the bloodstream as well as the mountain stream.

Nature's many other senses complete the global sensation orchestra. For example, the sense of excretion beautifully counterpoints the sense of thirst. Excretion feelings signal that we contain excess water. They also tell us that the natural world needs us to excrete water. Our excretions are food for other beings just as the water we drink is an excretion of plant and animal respiration. It is given to us. That is Nature's balanced way, a wild perfection that shares everything, treasures everything and therefore produces no garbage.

The beaver does not have to rationalize its decisions about dam building. Thus it avoids our cultural bias which so demeans natural senses and feelings as subjective, unscientific, childish, sentimentality, that we seldom recognize their vital role. Yet the Planet's balanced governance is in part created by a congress of senses like thirst, excretion, hunger, place, community, trust, joy, magnetism, rationality, nurturing, procreation, language, colour...the more than 53 different

sense groups that pervade the natural world and ourselves. Knowing the world through only a few of them is like seeing a rainbow in black and white. Much of its worth is lost.

Nature's congress of senses guide the beaver and balance its technological prowess. Imagine how much better the world will be when our inborn senses of nurturing, community, trust, harmony, and place sanely guide our rationale for excessive industrialization and conquest of Nature.

Any sensible beaver will tell you that human society's problems originate by detaching our inherited inborn senses from their source in Nature. We let them die, or we re-attach them to destructive technologies and people. Modern people live their daily lives in less than 15 natural senses. Our greatest problem, *greed*, is nothing more than some of our senses not naturally being regulated by the others which we extinguished during our upbringing. *History shows that we cannot successfully live by our rationality and language senses alone, yet most of the time that is exactly where we exist.* It is why runaway technology and violence result from our lives, and not from the lives of beavers.

At birth, human natural feelings are alive. They ground us in Earth's monumental stability and wisdom. We don't exclusively own our feelings, they also belong to Earth. Societies, including beaver populations, respecting and culturing natural feelings deeply bond their offspring to Nature's harmonic ways. Like all natural beings, these societies seek places and relationships that *feel* most attractive. They think with their heart. They rarely produce the stress, pollution and violence that pervade modern life, while our relationship to the natural world is like hitting a pretty girl in the face with a shovel.

Because validating natural feelings achieves environmental and social responsibility, World Peace University published my *Field Guide to Connecting With Nature: Creating Moments That Let Earth Teach*. It lets beavers have their say. It therapeutically offers hundreds of sensation strengthening backyard or backcountry activities. They convey the integrity of the natural world by how good it feels, which is the way beavers know it. It enables the beaver's balance to become our eyes.

Citation Format

Cohen, Michael J. (1990) LEAVE IT TO BEAVERS *Trumpeter*: 7, 4.
<http://www.icaap.org/iuicode?6.7.4.6>

Document generated from IXML by ICAAP conversion macros.
See the [ICAAP](#) web site or [software repository](#) for details