

world and found that he has a taste for milkweed and violet leaves and takes naps after a big meal.

Porcupines mate in early autumn. Females begin advertising more than a week before they become receptive, so all of the males in the area have time to assemble. The porcupines emit terrible shrieks and whines as females rebuff unwanted advances and males argue about which among them is most worthy. While walking in the woods one night, I saw the rear ends of two porcupines, one heading into the bushes and the other disappearing up a hemlock tree. I was more than a quarter mile from home and over the crest of a steep hillside. "Fretful?" I asked. The porcupine in the bushes stopped, turned, and paced eagerly toward me making little moans of greeting. He sniffed my hand and then my face, and soon headed to the tree the other porcupine had just ascended.

For the half hour that I watched, Fretful rested and the other porcupine moved about quietly. She(?) then wandered over and sniffed Fretful's nose before settling down near him. I hypothesized that such amicable relations would occur after other business was taken care of.

Female porcupines cease to be interested in males once their eight to twelve hour window of availability has closed for the year. Does this explain Fretful's behavior one night last week? After eating his fill, he stayed nearby, exploring everything within reach. When I walked away, he hurried behind making earnest moans. I would have been more flattered if I didn't know he was attracted to quilly, pig-nosed quadrupeds.

While the rewards of a trusting relationship can be large, the animal's wellbeing must be given precedence. Many animals would be cruelly served to believe that all humans are trustworthy. Any animal that ranges widely will encounter people who do not merit trust. That is fine if you are a chickadee. Less fine if you are a bear. In the case of Fretful, given the size of a porcupine's territory and the disposition of my human neighbors, I cautiously deem our relationship mutually beneficial. Fretful will enter the lean season with the extra fat my offerings provide. For my part, I will learn more about the habits of porcupines and enjoy the honor of the touch of a trusting porcupine paw.



Fretful & Friend