

Sounds of Fall

By
Brian Zongker

It's that time of year again. The temps are a bit cooler; the leaves are starting to turn; the aroma of someone burning in their fireplace is in the air; the beginning of football season and the rut. If you don't know what the rut is then google it...you google everything else you don't know about. Ok, I'll let you off the hook. The rut is basically mating season for elk. That time of year when the bulls gather up their harem and focus on extending their bloodlines. The sex crazed bulls become more aggressive, wallow in mud, cover themselves with urine, charging at each other and locking antlers as they battle over dominant status and mating rights. Reminds me of a typical Saturday night back home.

Any time I get the chance during this time of year, I go out either early in the morning or later in the evening just to try to hear the elk bugling. The first time you hear it for real, it's kind of eerie. The far off almost whistle to the up close, guttural groans. It is a mystical, magical sound that is both soothing and scary at the same time. If you are lucky, you will get to hear it up close and, if you're super lucky, you will get front row seats to a duel. One bull will call off to your right and one will answer from off to your left. They get closer and louder... the anticipation, the adrenalin racing through your veins -- you catch a glimpse, the two finally meet locking antlers, pushing and scraping each other around. A fight of the fittest. Rarely ending in injury, the strongest bull wins the right to mate while the weaker goes off to somehow restore his pride and work up the strength to make another run. Maybe this time to an older, weaker bull. Either way for over a month from early September to about the middle of October, you can head out and experience this all for yourself.

We always talk about the sights and the scenery here in the White Mountains. As beautiful as it is, don't let it distract you from the sounds. The sounds of the White Mountains are equally impressive. You just need to take the time to listen. I am out on the trail in some form or fashion all the time. Almost literally every day, at least in the spring, summer and fall. I had someone ask me the other day if I listened to music on my phone while I ride. I said no because I would miss the sounds. Most of the time, I hear the beasties before I see them. If I'm hiking, it's really the same deal. I don't want to miss out on the wonder by blocking out the sound. Now when I'm driving through town, I'll crank the tunes. Who needs to pay attention while driving.

So, the next time you're out on the trail, soak in the beauty but also take in the sounds. You never know what you may hear besides the elk. From coyotes to crickets, owls to cows, raccoons to bears and even mountain lions. Oh, for sure....take the time to google the sound a mountain lion in heat makes. That will keep you up at night. What really may keep you up at night is why exactly I was googling a mountain lion in heat. Good story, another time.