

Making Ripples

Found in Funny Places

When wildlife hide in our homes

by Amanda Bancroft

A black bear on the porch. Tree frogs found in the mailbox. Beavers in the spring house and porcupines in the tool shed. A black snake under the bed. Wasps, spiders, ants and mice just about everywhere. These local encounters can be cause for concern or celebration, depending on the personality of the wild visitor and host.

Once there was a big bowl of peanut butter M&M's on my desk. The mice rejoiced with glee until they, too, resembled peanut butter M&M's and the bowl was empty. The framed spouse, having been reprimanded for eating an entire bowl himself, quickly discovered the real culprits. Humane traps were effectively employed and the mice released four miles away to ensure they couldn't return. We made certain of this success by noting their individual characteristics, such as a hole in the ear from some past battle.

Getting mail is great, but having Gray Tree frogs mail themselves to you is really great! A few times each year, they ascend the pole or climb down from the foliage and climb into the box using their suction-cup toe pads. There they sit, resembling small gray pebbles, totally camouflaged with the gray metal mailbox. During removal, they seem to enjoy perching on a finger and don't like to budge. Rinsing hands thoroughly before picking up any amphibian will help prevent oils and bacteria from our skin from harming these sensitive creatures, and it's best to wash hands with soap afterwards.

Southern flying squirrels, with round black eyes like a sugar glider's, have been known to nest in attics and sheds. Rarely seen, it's a treat and a terror for some folks. Grey squirrels and fox squirrels also love houses, especially over winter when they can be heard arguing about whose nest it is. Installing a one-way exit over their hole helps current residents escape while future residents can't move in.

Wasps come in all colors and sizes, and seem to like porches, bird nesting boxes and even clothes lines. But they hate bar soap. An application of soap in spring and at the end of summer usually encourages them to look elsewhere. Just rub the soap across the surface they're attracted to, no pesticides needed. Prevention is better than cure.

Of course, sometimes things just happen unexpectedly and there's no time to prevent them. The rat can't stay in the toilet, and the birds nesting on the garage door will meet their doom if not relocated. Before removal, arm yourself with as much knowledge as possible (like whether or not the animal can hurt you or vice versa – often, first impressions are misleading!) and seek professional help if needed.

Amanda Bancroft is a writer, artist, and naturalist building an off-grid cottage for land conservation on Mt. Kessler. She and her husband Ryan blog about their adventures and offer a solar-hosted online educational center on how to make a difference with everyday choices at: www.RipplesBlog.org.