

VOLUME 6, NO. 2 Summer 1988

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LETTERS

More "African Diary" . . .

I was so glad to see my story in BATS. We now have 34 bats and five babies in the colony. One of the mothers is Fawn, who we have photographed before. The oldest baby I have named Samau (Sa ma' oo), after the Swahili word for dry season, because it was born before the rains began. The smallest baby I named Wafula, meaning rainy season. Once we saw him suckling, but most of the time he is hidden in his mother's wings. Other bats we recognize from last year are Sir Percival, the General, Tander, Crescent and maybe Helen.

Camellia Ibrahim
Kitale, Kenya

Camellia Ibrahim is a young BCI member whose observations on a fruit bat colony under the eaves of her house appeared in the Spring 1988 issue of BATS.

Bat family rescue . . .

At dusk in the summer, bats fly around our semi-rural house in southern Ontario, Canada. One morning we were roused by squabbling birds in our backyard. Blue jays were fluttering and squawking around a small brown animal on a grassy slope. We chased the jays away and found that they had been harassing a bat which was crawling with its wings spread, seemingly unable to fly. We gently picked it up and took it to the picnic table where we could have a look at it.

It was quite a pretty little thing. When we turned it over, we found it had a baby clinging to its tummy, but looking closer, we saw that it had *three* babies! It seemed that the weight of the babies was too much for it when it tried to get airborne. So we got an old bird cage and began to put the four bats inside. As we were doing this, the adult, which was now disentangled from two of the babies, suddenly took off, leaving us with two baby bats. We hung them by their feet from a thin bird perch and left them in the cage, all wrapped up in their wings with their faces hidden.

We looked at them occasionally during the day, but they never moved. When it began to get dark, we took the cage outside and I hung one of the babies from my finger. Suddenly a bat fluttered near my face out of the gathering darkness. I was startled and dropped the baby. The next thing I knew, the adult landed on the grass, scooped the baby up, and flew off. So now we were left with one baby.

We tried hanging it from our fingers to see if the mother bat--we presumed it was the mother--would come back. Nothing happened. After a while we hung the baby from the stem of a Boston Ivy leaf on the wall by our back door. We went out from time to time to check on it with a flashlight. It seemed quite content, all wrapped up tight. During the next check, we found the mother bat hanging beside it, and when we checked again about 10 minutes later, the baby was clinging to her tummy. The next time we looked, they were both gone. My children, of course, were highly taken with the bat episode.

You say that bats have only one baby a year. If that's the case, then our mother bat must

have been babysitting for two other mothers.

D.K. Murray
Fonthill, Ontario,
Canada

The mother was a Red bat (Lasiurus borealis). Unlike most species of North American bats, their average litter is three babies. After storms, they are often found grounded with their young, unable to fly in strong winds with the added weight. Blue jays are common predators at this vulnerable time. A note of precaution: wild animals are apt to bite in self-defense when picked up. A grounded bat can also be sick, and a protective glove should be worn if you want to move it to a safer location.



Female red bats often give birth to three or more babies. PHOTO BY MERLIN D. TUTTLE

Bats in the attic . . .

My husband and I have bats in our attic. We know because we have seen them sneak into the house by crawling under the attic door□ a space of about a third of an inch! However, it's usually three or four A.M. when these adorable creatures choose to visit and for some reason, they prefer my bedroom to any other in our house.

This problem seldom occurs during the winter months when I understand that they usually hibernate. When warm weather arrives, so do the nocturnal visits by my dear, dark friends. It's not unusual to be awakened once a week by a wandering bat, but occasional occurrences of twice in one night are sometimes too much to bear! My husband now quickly responds to my plea "Bat Patrol," which usually involves 30 to 60 minutes of trying to catch a frightened bat with a make-shift butterfly net (which we quickly direct to an open window). Surely there must be an easier way! Georgia Dunfey South Freeport, Maine

Yes, there is. Swing the butterfly net from behind to avoid detection. Don't panic, keep it in sight, and try to isolate it to one room as much as possible by closing doors to the rest of the house. Open the windows to allow its natural exit. Or simply let the bat land and approach slowly to avoid frightening it back into flight; you can clamp a small box or empty can over the bat and slide a piece of cardboard underneath to trap it so it can be released outside.

You can then take preventive measures to keep the bats from entering your home again. First, install a draft guard under your attic door; if that is indeed where they are entering your living quarters, that will solve the problem.

A question BCI is also frequently asked is how does one find where bats are getting into the attic, and how can they be evicted without harm. Keep in mind that bats do not make new holes or chew through insulation (or anything else), but can squeeze through very small cracks (as little as 3/8" X 1"). Common entry points are under the eaves, ungrated

chimneys, and loose-fitting siding, screen doors or windows. Anyone who has enough bats to create a real nuisance has enough to note where they enter and leave. In summer, the bats must emerge each dusk to feed, and this is an opportunity to see where they exit. Once exits are located, bird netting (the kind used to protect fruit orchards) can be hung in front of the holes, extending at least two feet to each side and below, with the bottom hanging free. The bats will be able to leave, but will not be able to find their way back. The netting, which can be obtained from hardware or garden stores, should be kept in place for several nights to make certain all bats have left before more permanent repairs are made. In North America, this should not be done during June or July when flightless young may be left to starve.

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