

LETTERS

Dealing with unexpected guests...

Watching a VCR film with friends, we became aware of a bat flying above us. One of our friends was terrified! Of course, we weren't, but we had great difficulty getting the bat safely out of the house and into the night. We realize that prevention is the best remedy for such bat-in-house incidents, but once the bat is there, how can we make certain it goes out the opened door or window and not behind a book, picture, or high ceiling fan?

Penny Morris
Denmark, Maine

Bats that appear in people's homes are most often lost youngsters whose only interest is to escape. Certainly a panicked response can cause further problems. People frightened of the bat may want only to leave the house as quickly as possible, but this is the worst possible thing to do. By the time they come back, the bat will likely have wandered off into another part of the house and gone to sleep where it may be almost impossible to find.

As much as possible, keep the bat in sight while closing all doors leading into other parts of the house, thereby isolating the bat to a single room. *Then* open the windows or doors to the outside so the bat can leave on its own. You need not turn off the lights to be successful.

A more direct approach is to use a butterfly net (if you have one), and swing it from behind to avoid detection or harm to the bat. Otherwise, be patient, wait until the bat lands, and approach it slowly to avoid frightening it back into flight. Then clamp a small box or coffee can over it, and slide a thin piece of cardboard under the container to trap the bat inside. A mailing tube (with one end sealed) eased close to the bat's face also works well, since a bat will often crawl inside to hide. Then you can release it outside. You can also try a towel or leather-gloved hands. The bat may bite in self-defense when grabbed, but not through leather.

To the rescue...

Last June my neighbor's two children ran over to get me. I found a red bat surrounded by three cats in their driveway. Once the children removed the cats, I discovered that the bat had four pups. My wife brought over a 3-gallon plastic bucket to put the bat family into, and I found a leafless branch for them to cling to. I put a jar lid filled with water at the bottom, and with a light rope, hoisted the bucket up under my front porch, hoping that it would provide a safe place.

The first night the mother left her young at 10:40. My driveway light provided plentiful insects for her, and I was amazed by her speed and agility. The next morning I looked in to find her nursing and grooming her pups. Some quick research found that red bats don't usually survive more than a few days in captivity, and I didn't know what to do next. The Dallas Zoo couldn't take them and confessed they knew little about red bats. As a private investigator, I was determined to find a bat expert. After a few calls, I heard about Merlin Tuttle and left several messages on his home answering machine, not knowing then that he

was out in the field for a month.

When I didn't get a call back right away, I knew I was on my own. Every two days I removed the branch, the bats clinging without fuss while my wife tossed out the guano. About three to four hours of morning sun shined on the bucket each day, and they appeared to be comfortable. The mother moved her regular departure to 11:15 P.M. and zoomed around the yard until about 2:00 in the morning. This went on for eight days. Occasionally the mother would fly over my head and across my legs as I sat in a lawn chair. I would feel the wind from her wings, but to my surprise, not a sound.

On the ninth day the pattern changed. That morning no sign of the mother, though she returned at her usual 11:15 that night, making about 20 passes over the bucket before dropping in. A few minutes later I looked inside, and she was nursing the babies. She must have been roosting elsewhere during the day, returning at night to feed them. Then on July 5th, she took the largest pup, and the runt died. The next day I found another pup dead. By the 7th, still no sign of the mother. I took the remaining pup to a refuge for wild animals, but it lived only another two days.

Even though this was a painful, saddening ending, I would do it again. I learned a lot and had a chance to educate my neighbors and help eliminate their fear of bats. Later, around midnight, I caught a glimpse of what may have been the mother red bat making a pass as if to say thanks for trying.

Buddy Sledge
Dallas, Texas



Having twins or even quintuplets is not uncommon among red bats, unlike most other North American bats who give birth to only one young at a time.

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