

## Bats Make Poor Pets

Technically LuAnn and I have only two pets – both cats – but last week we discovered we have a house full. We were minding our own business about dusk one evening when a shadowy figure began whooshing around our living room, much to the delight of our cats.

It was a small bat, which I watched with fascination as it deftly avoided me, the walls, the ceiling fan and other domestic obstacles. LuAnn was on a phone call at the time with a friend, having a conversation which abruptly ended with a shrill “I have to call you back!”

Immediately following LuAnn’s next piercing directive, I ran to our garage to retrieve a fine-mesh net formerly used to remove goldfish from our backyard pond during the none-too-frequent cleanings. We haven’t had goldfish for years, dating from when the local wildlife finally discovered them. For a week or so we were effectively running a raccoon sushi bar, until the stock was depleted.

Goldfish, by the way, are the only pets I’ve ever found to be even more indifferent than cats. On the plus side, they do tend to hack up fewer fur balls.

Anyway, I ran back to the living room where LuAnn was trying to corral the cats and avoid the bat herself. I flung open our front door, which is separated from the living room by a small vestibule. I remember wondering if it would be too much to expect an animal with a brain the size of a pea to be able to find its way out, because I wasn’t optimistic I could snag it in midair.

I stood in front of the only other door in the room, wielding the fish net like a demented field hockey goalie. Every time the bat came toward me I waved the net threateningly and it reversed course. Maddeningly, a couple of times it flew into the vestibule only to fly back into the living room. Finally, it flew into the vestibule again and disappeared.

This wasn’t our first bat rodeo. In fact, our last one was almost exactly 20 years ago when we chased one out of our upstairs bedroom. What we discovered then – and is almost certainly the case now – is that we had a colony of bats living in our attic. Swell.

LuAnn knows her bats. She grew up in a house that featured bat chases every spring. It had an effect on her - she became somewhat paranoid about the creatures, and she still squeaks when she gets excited. The bat chases at her house never ended prettily.

You'll be glad to know we're keeping our new pets air-conditioned. By making sure our upstairs is cool it's less likely the bats will move father down our walls during the afternoon as the attic gets too hot for them, which makes it more likely some will fall out into our basement.

Google up bats and you're likely to end up on Bacardi's web site. The distillery uses a bat as its corporate symbol, and the company does a lot to combat misinformation and preserve the species. Not surprisingly, Bacardi rum goes a long way toward relieving stress; bat-related or otherwise.

Briefly, bats are not blind, they do not intentionally get tangled in your hair and less than 1% of them ever contract rabies. They're meticulously clean, they consume a tremendous number of night-flying insects, and almost every person who gets bitten does so because they pick up a sick or injured bat.

Since it's illegal to kill bats, we'll need to evict ours. Again. We can't do that until the baby bats are able to fly on their own, which won't be for another month or two. In the meantime, we are unwilling cohabitants with an unknown number of fellow mammals.

Long story short, we have sealed up every conceivable crack and hole between us and the attic, hoping the bats will continue to prefer use whatever opening leads directly outside. I figure it won't hurt to lay in a good supply of rum, too.

Writers Group member Dave Parsons figures that daily hangovers are a small price to pay if it calms his nerves and helps Bacardi dispel bat misinformation.