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AUG 8 1969

BAT CONTROL
by

BLACKSBURG, VA.

John C. Jones, Biologist, Fish and Wildlife Service

Although generally harmless, bats sometimes congregate in sufficient numbers to constitute a nuisance. Usually, bats are residents of caves, hollow trees, and similar roosting places, but they may, on occasion, find entrances and establish colonies in attics of homes, in old buildings, in lofts, and sometimes in unused or inactive chimneys. When their presence is objectionable it becomes necessary to drive them out.

Although there are several kinds of bats found in Virginia, some thirteen in all, their habits as far as the average householder is concerned are much the same. Some migrate with the changing seasons, following a steady source of food supply. Others remain in their roosts, hibernating during the colder months. Night-flying insects provide the bulk of the food and bats roost, head downwards, during most of the daytime. The young, usually one or two, cling to the parent until able to fend for themselves; no nest is provided. From the droppings and urine deposited about the roost comes a highly objectionable odor that is characteristic of bat roosting places. This odor persists for a long time after a roost is broken up and may serve to attract new colonies if preventive measures are not taken. The noises created by the bats are also disturbing, although no actual damage is done to the structure of the building. It is not true that flying bats are attracted to human beings and will become entangled in the hair. In general they are inoffensive animals highly beneficial to man.

Bat roosts in attics and similar closed spaces can often be cleared completely by the use of repellents. Napthalene flakes or paradichlorobenzene crystals are two commonly used chemicals for this purpose, bats apparently having a strong dislike for their odor. About two to five pounds should be enough for the average sized attic of a residence if the chemical is distributed liberally about the area where the bats are roosting. More may be required in a large space. Since these chemicals dissipate rapidly upon exposure to the air, the treatment should be repeated after a week if necessary. The odor of napthalene is so objectionable to bats that usually they will leave a premises where it is used, establishing a new roost elsewhere. They may return later, however, if ready entrances remain.

Openings through which bats enter the building should be closed if permanent control is desired. The larger spaces, such as louvers, vents, windows or similar openings should be covered with hardware cloth if ventilation is necessary, or permanently closed with sheet metal, masonry or other building material if not used. Broken siding should be replaced; cracks should be filled with oakum and sealed. Spaces wider than one-quarter of an inch will permit the entrance of bats. If all bats have not been expelled prior to proofing, at least one opening should be left until after dark, when the bats normally leave

on their nightly search for food. After all are out, the remaining openings may then be sealed. A careful check should be made from the outside of the building for several nights after proofing is completed, observing the actions of the bats. If any openings have been missed the bats will be likely to find them in an effort to re-establish their roost.

Fumigation, generally with calcium cyanide, has been used successfully for destroying a roost. The dust, or powdered form of the chemical, is pumped into small spaces occupied by the bats, the larger areas being taken care of by liquid or gas administrations. This is a dangerous practice, however, and should not be attempted unless the operator is fully conversant with the methods of handling poisonous gasses and is trained in their use. The entire premises must be vacated prior to the operation and remain vacant until the last trace of the gas has been removed. Other methods commonly employed for the control of mammals, such as poisoning, trapping, and shooting, are either ineffective or impractical.

Bat destruction, while accomplishing the desired purpose of eliminating a nuisance, has several disadvantages. Carcasses not recovered decompose, with a resultant unpleasant odor. Further, there is no degree of permanency obtained with fumigation. As soon as the space has been cleared of gas it is ready for new occupants if no proffing is done. Besides, bats are highly beneficial. Their destruction should not be encouraged when the use of repellents and proffing of the premises will answer the purpose.

Agricultural Extension Service Virginia Polytechnic Institute Blacksburg, Va.

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M.T. 70 Issued in furtherance of cooperative extension work in agriculture and home economics, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U. S. Department of Agriculture. L. B. Dietrick, director, Agricultural Extension Service, Virginia Polytechnic Institute, Blacksburg, Virginia.