

## **APOLOGIES FOR THE LATE ARRIVAL OF YOUR QUARTERLY, BUT... RATS**

*Everything you never wanted to know about what might be lurking in your crawl space*

As anyone unfortunate enough to have crossed our paths in the last month or so knows all too well, we have had a "rat problem". We've lived here full-time 23 years now, and while there have been the occasional run-ins with rodents, it's been normal country life - minor - and traps have sufficed. This gang (and I use the word advisedly) was/is in a different category altogether. These are the big guys, the (according to Wiki) street rat, sewer rat, Hanover rat, Norway rat, Parisian rat, water or wharf rat. All of these names are fairly descriptive, except Norway (they don't come from there) and Hanover (politics - named when people were ticked off with the House of Hanover in the 18th century - can't think why...)

First they gnawed through the hairline gap between the roof and exterior siding, getting into the walls and keeping our B&B guests uneasy with their squeaking and pattering about in there. Graeme risked life and limb to find and close (we hope) their entrances. Thwarted, they got into the heating ducts, and when our intrepid house sitter was here in the Spring, and had the heat on, guests began to notice "an unfortunate smell."

Enter some professional duct cleaners, and exit \$800.

The rats moved into quieter quarters in the basement/crawl space under the main house. We didn't think things could get much worse, but this was where they discovered a taste - no, an addiction - to plastic pipe, so our water system was attacked. EVERY. NIGHT. (Yes, we left them a nice dish of water as an alternative, but... not interested.) Grae had to turn the water off at night, go down in the morning, turn it on, check where the new leaks were, turn it off, fix the leaks, and we were good for another day. (They only rumble at night - thank heaven for miniscule mercies.)

In the meantime, under the heading of blessings heavily disguised, we are being forced to get rid of everything we had stored in the basement. It's more than time, but... but... but... well, that's why the Quarterly is late.

Some books were lost to water damage, but not to worry, there are several thousand left for the next library sale. Another tough pill to swallow, but thank you Celine, for the Thetis Island Library!

Until a few days before this writing, almost nothing we tried worked. "Almost", because we did manage to catch one in an electronic zapper trap, but apparently only one of them has to die to teach the others to avoid it. They're pretty athletic escape artists too. Grae disturbed a couple in the wall when he was tearing out the chewed wallboard and insulation. They exploded out of the wall, one of them racing through a spring trap, triggering it but not getting caught, and the other leaping into a bucket trap en route. Bounced right out again and was gone.

Even so, we are ENORMOUSLY grateful to the friends who have loaned us their best and most lethal devices. Hope has kept us going.

For the record, we have tried:

- Box traps (brilliant idea that usually works - Thank you Don - but these guys must be refugees from your side of the island. The ones who got away.)
- Electronic zappers, caught one!!! That's how we know for sure how big these characters are. Probably eight or nine inches nose to rump, and tail almost as long.
- Bucket traps, no luck so far, but lots of people recommend them. And there's a great version (for amusement purposes at least) at the Facebook page of someone who calls himself DIY Rat Trap (thanks Mary!)
- Other ongoing preventatives of unknown value, but we are using them anyway. Sonic whatsits, strobe lights, peppermint oil, moth balls. Also tried, when we could stand it and we had no guests, a boom box directed into the heating ducts. Talking heads and pop music at full volume echoing everywhere.
- Used kitty litter in open containers spread around. Ok, so we don't enjoy spending time down there now, but hopefully neither will they. It's a predator scent, and we tried it just before...

THE GOOD NEWS! Pepper spray on the pipes, and possibly in conjunction with the booming talk, the strobe lights and the kitty litter, might - just might - have convinced them that we are lousy landlords. We have had, since then, no nights with new water leaks!!! (and no droppings or other evidence.) A note of caution about the pepper spray - it is truly horrible stuff. Expensive (6.5 seconds of spray for \$60 from Canadian Tire) but each touch of the nozzle shoots a vicious mist 30 feet, so you get a lot of coverage for those seconds. However, have hazmat clothing, breathing masks and eye protection. I came home shortly after Grae had "done" the workshop and garage, and unknowingly went into the open garage. Was still coughing and gagging hours later. Also, touching it with bare skin really burns.

Obviously, this battle may be won (crossing fingers) but the war rages on. In our conversations about it to other islanders, we have realized that there seems to be an increase for a lot of people this year. In Vancouver, too. New source? Or population growth to tipping point?

Anyway, recognizing that winter is coming and they will all be house-hunting, we are not getting complacent. Other options to try: pepper impregnated electrical tape (in case they turn their attention to the wiring); a Jack Russell terrier on loan - maybe he can either kill them or scare them out; last and least desirable option, poison via exterminators. We don't want them dying in the walls, or outside where other wildlife or pets will have them for dinner and die themselves. If anyone knows of any other solution, please get in touch - dispatches from the frontlines, in the Q as needed!

I understand that we are not alone. I have heard that the Cowichan Tribe at Cowichan Bay has had a serious problem with them this year, and has written to the appropriate authorities asking to have the freighters banned from the Bay, figuring the rats must have come from there. If you can contain your surprise, there has been no response to this.

Well, it ain't over 'til it's over, so wish us well and good luck with yours...

Veronica Shelford