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Tuesday, September 30, 2008 |

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A squirrel note from Scotland

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By [DAVID S. KERR](#)

Published: September 12, 2008

When I write about certain topics, ones I think are controversial, or at the very least ones I am convinced will prompt a response from our readers, I am sometimes disappointed that I don't hear from anyone. The silence can be disappointing. But there is one topic, and this still amazes me, one that always gets a reaction and that's anything to do with squirrels.

Recently, when I wrote an article about how the American Gray squirrel, an invasive species in England, was supplanting the beloved British Red Squirrel, I got several e-mails on the topic and most notably a letter from a man in Dunbartonshire, Scotland. Yes, to my delight there is someone in Scotland who reads the Stafford Sun. He was fond of gray squirrels and didn't think my article saying they were taking over the British countryside was fair.

Call them pests, or cute little woodland creatures, they are some of the best column material I have ever come across.

One of the biggest complaints about squirrels, even from those of us who like them, is that they can, and let's not mince words here, be pests. They dig up flowers, put little holes all around the garden, and yes, can even take up residence in attics, crawl spaces, and out buildings. I am convinced that my grandmother's house had squirrels living in the attic whose ancestors probably first moved in sometime before the start of

World War II. Given that the average squirrel, if he is lucky, lives about three years, that's a lot of squirrel generations.

That's why I was particularly impressed by a recent invention I came across for humanely getting squirrels out of an attic. The Web site promises that the "Evictor" will rid your attic or crawl space of squirrels in 24 to 48 hours. What it relies on is a strobe light that puts out a pulse of 175,000 candle power. Just think of a 1970's era disco strobe light on steroids. However, if you want an accompanying sound track of Disco music, say, including "Do the Hustle," and other forgettable favorites of the era, you have to supply that yourself. What happens is that that squirrels get so annoyed by the flashing light that they just pack up and leave. Apparently they can't stand Disco either. From all accounts it works.

Other inventions aimed at dealing with squirrels are various innovative bird feeder designs. To a squirrel, a bird feeder is an all you can eat buffet. Most of the designs intended to foil the modern day American gray squirrel give him as little to hang on to as possible. Tubular designs, with tiny perches, are popular and so are feeders with big plastic or metal disks on top of them. These are similar to the disks ships have on their mooring ropes to keep rats from coming aboard. It works, but only to a point. Squirrels are more agile than rats and are very good at getting around obstacles. I have also seen bird feeders with devices designed to give the squirrel a little electrical jolt if he gets too close. It sounds like a lot of bother, and having worked with electric fences before, I know that if I had one of these gadgets, I would probably end up giving myself an accidental jolt as well.

Of course, as I have said before, my great uncle, with his .22, could have dealt with the problem just fine. He wasn't as fond of squirrels as I am. However, most people, I imagine, aren't that attracted to the notion of having an old man, sitting on an overturned bucket shooting at squirrels in their front yards. So, I think we're all agreed that more humane methods are preferable.

One story that caught my eye awhile back concerned a naturalist in Silver Spring who was actively studying squirrel behavior. His problem, however, wasn't just catching them. He also had to measure them, weigh them, and then tattoo them with a tracking number. He was finding this next to impossible. His solution was surprisingly elegant. Knowing that squirrels like peanut butter, they like anything with nuts in it, he mixed it with a low dose of valium and left the concoction in the yard for them to eat. After their little snack they quickly settled down for an afternoon nap. That gave him plenty of time to do his work.

In the suburbs, when it comes to squirrels, and probably a host of other small woodland creatures, we humans are probably always going to have something of a love them or hate them relationship. Me, I like them and though I wish they would leave my tomatoes alone, I can tolerate their occasionally annoying behavior.

David S. Kerr is an Aquia resident and a former member of the Stafford County School Board. Contact him at info@staffordcountysun.com.

Reader Reactions

Posted by (Bill) on September 28, 2008 at 9:57 pm

Hello,

Thanks for mentioning the Evictor. Though strickly for indoor use, it will also evict raccoons, skunks,

possums, Norway rats and roof rats.

Bill Earl - Co-Inventor of the Evictor
Strobe Light

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