

A Squirrel, A Hockey Stick and A Crazy Housewife...

Many years ago (about twenty - really, where on *earth* has that time gone!?) we were living in a small two bedroom house in North London. We backed onto a thin strip of wooded area which was frequented by the local foxes, who were bold to say the least. I will always remember one of them joining us at one of the back garden BBQs and leaving, having been served his dinner by one of the attendees, with a napkin sticking out of the corner of his mouth. I digress. The thin strip of woodland was also frequented by squirrels, and we had been kept awake for several nights by the sounds of them gnawing their way through the loft directly above the bedroom. It sounded as if they were building an empire. We were at our wits end. Me, an ex-strident vegetarian and militant animal lover, had begun to lie awake at night fantasising about the various grim and grisly methods by which I would dispatch one of the little blighters, if I ever managed to get my hands on them.

This went on for some time, until one morning when it all came to a head. At the time we had windows that could not be opened except for the three top slats. I was lying in bed one morning, idly considering the view out the window, when a head suddenly appeared in the middle of the ceiling above me. Yup, one of the squirrels had chewed a perfect squirrel-shaped hole in the ceiling and had stuck his face through, along with his two front legs in order to have a good look around his new domain. I was horrified. He was on the verge of plopping through into the bedroom and if that happened, due to the rubbish windows that didn't open, I would have no way of getting him out of the house. I grabbed a hockey stick. If he did decide to launch himself, kamikaze-like, into the bedroom, I would have to shoo him, somehow, out of the bedroom door, down the stairs, through the kitchen and out into the garden. The theme tune to Benny Hill struck up a continuous loop inside my battle-wearied brain.

I decided to call the R.S.P.C.A.. They, surely, would know what to do and would immediately rush to the rescue of an unarmed squirrel at the mercy of a crazy housewife brandishing a hockey stick with intent. Their response?

"Unless it's dying or in mortal pain, love, we can't help you."

"Hmm," I thought. "Give me minute and I could fix that..."

By this time, fortunately, the offender had decided to retreat to the inner empire of the loft, and the disaster was averted. But the problem remained, and now it was serious. We hit on a plan - we bought a humane trap from the garden centre, and baited it with the most delicious combination of peanut butter, nuts and seeds that we could find. As it was London, and the wildlife was all relatively unconcerned about human activity (see Mr. Fox above), we managed to catch four squirrels over the following week. In combination with blocking up their access point - the problem was solved. Hoorah.

Unfortunately we now have the same problem here at the farm. We employed the humane trap again, confident in a succession of easy successes. Alas, country squirrels are obviously far more cautious, or perhaps just better fed than their city counterparts, and so far we haven't caught a single one. Next stop? I feel a bulk buy of rubber snakes on the horizon...

Ed

