

Bats in the attic (well, roof)

If you happen to be in our sitting room at dusk at this time of the year you might be forgiven for thinking that there was an army of mice having a clog dance in the roof. A nice idea but no – it is actually the maternity roost of Soprano Pipistrelle Bats getting ready for their night-time activities. How such tiny things with tiny claws can make such a noise is a mystery – but soon it is all over as they drop, one by one, out of the roof at the front of the house and whizz up



the track opposite to their favoured hunting grounds. I stood outside a few nights ago and counted them – 276!. And when they have all had their babies it will be 552. Where they are all squeezing themselves in I have no idea – there is no loft, and it is a modern roof made of a sandwich of plasterboard, expanded foam insulation, blue plastic and slates. It gets extremely hot up there on a summer day but somehow they survive and apparently thrive.

Except they do not always thrive in bad weather – the babies get hungry and then they go exploring. This is when they somehow finish up in the sitting room. They can squeeze through the tiniest gap and on one memorable July day a few years ago we rescued 13 baby bats. We would find them crawling across the floor, stuck inside a rubbish bin, in the kitchen sink and particularly attached to wall carpets and hangings, visible only from the side as a little brown blob where a little brown blob shouldn't be! So what to do with an ice-cream tub full of ungrateful baby bats, hissing and baring their teeth at you?

Luckily the entrance to the roost is not too high up and we found that if we (that is, Peter) climbed up a stepladder and put a baby bat up right by the entrance, however weak and pathetic it looked, it suddenly perked up and crawled excitedly into the roost. Whether it would ever be re-united with mum is another question but it was the best we could do.

Peter has now spent significant time up a tall ladder with a pot of filler filling in any possible gaps in the plasterboard in the ceiling and the last few years have been baby-bat free. However, we still get the occasional adult bat in the sitting-room and we have absolutely no idea where they are coming from. We can lure them out by switching off the light in sitting room and switching on the light on the hall then when the bat has moved into the hall, opening the back door, switching on the outside light and all other lights off – apparently bats don't use echo-location in buildings (I guess there would be too many echoes) but use their poor eye-sight and they are attracted to the light. But we only found this out by trial and error and I mention it here in case you have the same problem yourself. We have had no success at all in getting them to fly out of a window.

So the next bat season is upon us – I wonder what excitement this one will bring?

Rosemary Royle