

Flying Mammals and Slithering Reptiles... by Cindy Williams,

I mentioned last month that we have been seeing a lot of Raccoons this winter with distemper, and other than Raccoons our winter guests are mostly raptors. But we've also been seeing a fair amount of Big Brown Bats coming into the Center. It's not uncommon to have "bats in the belfry", or in our case the attic. Bats are pretty good at finding a relatively warm place to sleep away the winter, and once they have found that place they tend to return to it. So why do these bats interrupt their winter naps and startle the people living in the space underneath? Well, sometimes they get disturbed by construction or other activity in or near their borrowed home. But probably a more likely reason this year is the precipitous dips and rises in temperatures we have been experiencing. The attics get warmer than normal and bats are very sensitive to air currents and temperatures. If they wake up and decide to go feeding it still might be too cold outside, but downstairs there is this warm place where they might find food. Once they find some gap between the attic and the main home where the "tropical" air is seeping in, they ride the wave through that gap (so to speak) and voila – you have a bat problem.



During the summer you might hear them come and go at dawn and dusk, but in the winter you would be unlikely to detect them in your attic as easily.

If a bat enters your living area in the winter, the best thing you can do is catch it and bring it to us (or another licensed wildlife rehabber who works with bats). Though it is unlikely to be infected with rabies you still have to take careful precautions and should contact your physician if there is ANY chance that anyone in your family has been bitten or scratched. Opening the door or window and shooing it outside is a death sentence for the bat (unless it turns right around and goes back in your attic). They can be caught by using a net or towel when they land up high, or placing a container over them if they are on the ground. Bats have a hard time taking flight from the ground and will usually crawl to something they can climb. So once they are on the ground it's relatively easy to place something over them (like a large coffee can, for instance, or a glass bowl you can see through). When you have something over the top you can carefully slide something like a piece of cardboard underneath (careful, don't hurt her!) then slowly turn it over so that the bat is in the container and the cardboard is covering the top. We actually keep them in Folger's containers with a piece of cloth hanging over the side on the inside for them to hang onto and another cloth over the top held on with a rubber band. This gives them a nice place to literally hang out and enough air to breathe until they can be transported to a rehabber with the appropriate setup.



Once you find you have a bat issue, the best thing to do is find the gap(s) they are using to enter and exit your attic and the gaps through which they enter your home. Fill the attic-to-home gaps immediately, but you will want to place an excluder in the gap that they use to travel to and from the outside. Do not just fill the gaps because then you'll have panicked bats who will either find their way to your main living area or die in your attic. Wait for the bats to leave the attic through the excluder (which prevents them from returning) then fill the holes. But don't do it between mid-May and mid-August because they will probably have babies that end up being separated from mom and die.

Similarly we sometimes get other beasts who tend to strike fear into the hearts of us poor humans – snakes. Snakes have a similar story to bats. They have found a place to hole up for the winter, and sometimes that place is your basement. And sometimes you need something from the basement and you disturb them (silly humans). Or your cat wanders down there and disturbs them (silly cat). Well, you get the picture. Again, send them on



their way outside and they are doomed. So they must be helped out over the winter. Here are a few of our current winter residents who have been with us for a month or so and will remain until the weather warms up.

This beautiful Garter Snake came to us from Ray County. He was found with some blood on his tail and has been receiving medication for it, but he's past that time now and has already sloughed off some old skin – however, he may need to have a little bit of his tail amputated. Unfortunately he's not eating too well and has to be tube fed, but hopefully he'll start eating soon. He just doesn't seem to appreciate the yummy worms and crickets we've offered so far. But he's very chill as snakes go and very easy to handle.

This guy (or gal), on the other hand, is having none of us. Can you identify this beauty? Eastern Coachwhip? Prairie King Snake? After several tries, we think he's a Yellow-Bellied Racer. He's a local boy (or girl) but apparently still VERY pissed about having to be pried off that glue trap that he stumbled onto. The vegetable oil bath was not to his liking AT ALL. And now he just wants to let you know how unhappy he is about the whole thing. The good news is that he seems just fine, he's eating very well and he's very active. Look at him just waiting to see if he can take a piece out of my finger! He made several lunges, believe me. Even tried to get us through the cage window. He's a nice sassy little thing.



When they are eating well and don't need medication and wound care, they are really pretty easy to care for. They get misted every day, get their water changed frequently, and only need to be fed once a week. And they are very quiet...

I didn't realize until I saw this next bird in the rehab room that, as often as I see them in the wild I had never seen one in rehab before. I wonder why that is? They are very common birds and in fact are year-round residents of most of the United States. This is the male Red-Winged Blackbird, a really beautiful bird with a variety of calls. This one came in all the way from Creighton, Missouri. He's one of those mystery cases where we can't really see anything wrong but for some reason the bird can't fly, and that's an issue! The people who found him said his right wing was droopy but he's not flapping very strongly with his left wing either. There is nothing broken. So we'll keep him around for a while and give him some minor pain/inflammation medication and hope that he improves.



Try not to buy into the fear factor that bats and snakes and blackbirds might engender. It may make for a great movie plot, but in real life they are just little creatures trying to make it in a cold world. Give them a helping hand if possible and appreciate their role in the natural world.