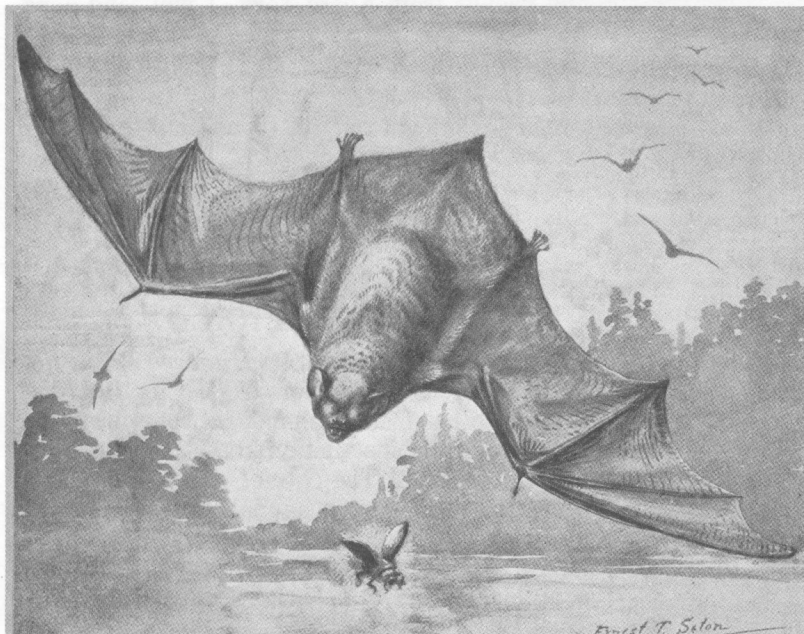


THE 'TEEN WINDOW

... *An Opening On The Natural World Around Us*

by
Hope Sawyer Buyukmihei

I'VE BEEN THINKING about bats, those night-flying creatures who look like mice with wings, but who belong to the order Chiroptera, not Rodentia. They are more nearly related to us humans than to rodents—the name Chiroptera meaning “hand-wing.” The bones in a bat's wing are es-



entially the same as those in a human's arms and hands.

There are more than a thousand species of bats, from the big fruit bats called flying foxes to the tiniest of all, about the size of a bumble bee.

Unfortunately, bats are so surrounded by myth and superstition that people completely misunderstand and fear them. Bats in this country are usually connected with Halloween, witches and haunted houses.

Myths about bats include the following: bat manure is a dangerous source of disease; bats are dirty; bats should be poisoned; bats are apt to get tangled in your hair. These ideas are not only wrong, they are ridiculous.

Bat manure, called guano, is a source of rich fertilizer, not disease. And bats themselves keep

Bats

their bodies clean by meticulous grooming. They air-bathe by the hour while flying through cool nights capturing insects.

The idea that bats are creepy and try to get into women's hair is about as far from the truth as you can get. They can fly complicated mazes with their eyes shut, using echolocation to avoid wires stretched across their path. This system is, of course, vital to their pursuit of insects.

Most people are afraid to have these creatures living in their homes. Instead of welcoming them as valuable insect-controllers, they have a hysterical desire

to get rid of them. The pest control industry, which makes money on people's fear of bats, puts out incredibly sensational literature. The truth is, certain poisons advertised to get rid of bats are extremely hazardous to human health. And without bats, insect populations increase.

Dr. Merlin D. Tuttle, leading bat expert, asks people who have bats in their attic, or behind the chimney or shutters, “Are the bats doing any harm?” Then he advises the homeowner to weigh the possible nuisance of the bats against the good they do. He says that when people discover that bats are not dangerous, they often enjoy having them around. Many people who have come to him for help in getting rid of bats have ended up building bat houses instead.

Bats, by the way, do not multiply like crazy, as do mice, but normally give birth to only one offspring a year.

To learn a lot more about the wonderful world of bats, contact Bat Conservation International, Brackenridge Field Laboratory, University of Texas, Austin, TX 78712. And for an entertaining, fact-filled free booklet, illustrated with superb color photos, write to: Bacardi Imports, Inc., Bat Booklet, 7475 NW 7th St., Miami, FL 33126. ■ ■

NOTE: Have you been doing some thinking lately? If it is about animals, what you've seen that disturbs or delights you, write a letter to this column. Here's a chance to express your deepest feelings, your most profound thoughts. If you are 12-18 years of age, we would like to hear what you think about animals. We may publish what you say (unless you specifically request that we do not). Sorry, but we cannot answer each letter personally.

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