



Tales from a
Sisters Naturalist
by Jim Anderson

The Nugget goes 'batty'

At this point of my 87 years living on this beautiful old Earth I'm so used to the phone ringing at 11 p.m., nothing surprises me anymore. I can remember when it rang at quarter to midnight when my son Caleb was beginning to show his prowess and intense sense of adventure during his early driving years. I picked it up and asked, "Is there any blood?"

"No blood, dad," Caleb responded, "but the front-end of the Volvo doesn't look too good."

So, last week when it rang at about 11 p.m. I felt pretty good, Caleb's out of the Army, living over in Salem with his three young children and sweet wife, Kendra, and his great energy is spent working on remodeling his house.

Sue picked up the phone this time, and after she said the usual hello, the caller identified himself, "This is Pete, and I found a bat in Jim's office bathroom sink, what should I do...?"

Pete is the proofreader at *The Nugget*, and the Jim he was referring to is the editor,

Jim Cornelius. The bat was better identified when Pete added, "It looks like a big brown bat."

I suggested he find a cardboard box and place the bat inside and then I'd come in next morning and take a gander. If it wasn't sick and I couldn't identify the furry little guest, I'd take it to my dear pal in Bend, wildlife biologist Tom Rodhouse, with whom I've carried out a great many bat-oriented projects.

The next day I moseyed on down to *The Nugget* and took the bat in hand. It didn't appear to be ill, it wasn't a myotis, nor was it Townsend's big-eared bat, all of whom I know pretty well, and it did indeed look like a big brown bat.

Just to be sure, I drove into Bend to visit with Tom, and the minute he saw it, he said, "Oh, that's an adult male big brown bat (*Eptesicus fuscus*)."

Pete had hit it right on the money.

Said bat made a lot of complaining noises, squeaking loudly when Tom picked it up in his bat gloves. He pronounced it healthy, but said it looked hungry and dehydrated, and had (probably) been awakened from its hibernation for some reason. (Bats do wake up during hibernation to defecate and build up oxygen in their blood.)

I was under the impression most brown bats left Sisters Country for southern climes at the end of summer, but Tom ensured me that several will remain in winter in Central Oregon, if they can find a suitable

hibernaculum. Apparently this one — and in all probability, several of its relatives and friends — found such a place in the attic of the editor's office.

(Editor's note: Insert your own joke here.)

Then Tom went on to describe a small colony spending winter in his home in Bend, and how pleased he was for their company.

Big brown bats are — like all of the North American bats — nocturnal, roosting summer days in hollow trees, beneath loose tree bark, in the crevices of rocks, or in man-made structures such as attics, barns, old buildings, under eaves, and in bat houses. Like all our bats, big brown bats navigate through the night skies by use of echolocation, by producing ultrasonic sounds through the mouth, which also pinpoints prey.

They are experts at catching many kinds of night-flying insects including moths, beetles and even wasps (including yellow jackets). The strange-looking Jerusalem cricket of Sisters Country (aka Child of the Earth) — that sends shivers down some people's spines when they see one — is also prey, but they don't eat the heads.

Big brown bats hibernate during the winter months, often in different locations from their summer roosts. Winter roosts tend to be caves and underground mines where temperatures remain stable, however, where a large majority of



PHOTO BY JIM ANDERSON

NPS wildlife and bat biologist, Tom Rodhouse looking over an adult male big brown bat that dropped into *The Nugget* office.

these bats spend the winter is still unknown. That said, we now know the attic of *The Nugget* office is one we didn't know of.

It never fails! Every one of those late-evening and early morning calls and texts always provides me with some facet of Nature I didn't know (or forgot) and enriches my life.

Tom and I chin-wagged about the bat and we both decided it looked rather emaciated and needed a few square meals and rehydration. Well, my old veterinarian pal, Dr. Jeff Cooney has a rehab operation in Bend and plenty of meal worms, so he

now has the bat to fatten up.

When the time comes for the wandering bat to return to the "wild," so to speak, I'll see if the crew at *The Nugget* will have a positive attitude about their (apparent) small colony of hibernating big brown bats above their offices and be pleased to see me place their renter back in Jim C's attic.

Or, I could take it out to one of the many lava tubes in Bend that has several colonies of myotis and big-eared bats sleeping away the winter, but they may not have a positive attitude about a bat that doesn't speak their language, or snores...

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