

**Tales from a
Sisters
Naturalist**
by Jim Anderson

**The bane of our
existence**

Historically, there is no animal on the face of this good Earth who has caused we humans more problems than the mosquito. Not only have they spread death and destruction throughout the human race through transmitting disease, but in our effort to “control” these pestiferous little beasts we have caused environmental problems that have become almost as serious as the blood we’ve lost and the diseases we’ve suffered from.

Let’s face it, it’s really not the diseases that mosquitoes spread that most people beller and bawl about, it’s the annoyance: the buzzing, the interruption to outside recreational activities, the slapping of bodies in a constant effort to kill the little beasties, and all the other maddening, infuriating, exasperating vexations caused by mosquitoes.

If you have them nearby and can legally do something about it, PLEASE stay away from chemicals! If it’s standing water and the larvae are swimming around by the thousands, see if you can have it drained.

If it’s a big standing body of water and draining it is impossible, try putting some mosquito fish in it. The native larvae predators already there, such as dragonfly larvae, fish and such, do a wonderful job reducing mosquito larvae numbers, and mosquito fish help.

The thing about mosquitoes that is overlooked when we get enough of them is that they’re all in the food chain. Swallows are on top of the list of diurnal birds that can’t get along without them, and bats are on the nocturnal list.

If you want swallows to feed on your mosquitoes, just put swallow nesting boxes on the north side of poles, trees and/or buildings.

If you want to have bats flying about at night feasting on your annoying mosquitoes, put a bat house up on the side of one of your out-buildings. Not only will they feast on those mosquitoes bothering you, but they’ll provide a wonderful air show while fluttering about your domicile.

And while we’re on the subject of bats and mosquitoes, one of the most interesting books I have ever had the pleasure of reading was, “Bats, Mosquitoes and Dollars,” by Dr. Charles A. Campbell.

Around 1905, Dr. Campbell, freshly returned from fighting malaria in the Panama Canal, became the city bacteriologist in San Antonio, Texas and was confronted by malaria taking over the city.

He began experimenting with attracting bats to artificial roosts with the idea the bats would eat the mosquitoes and stop the spread of malaria. But he couldn’t get enough bats to live in San Antonio to do the job — and then he hit upon an idea that worked.

With \$500 of his own money, in 1907 he built the first artificial bat house he called, “Malaria-Eradicating, Guano-Producing Bat Roost” at the U.S. Experimental Farm near San Antonio. He called the 30-foot-tall tower “my monument.” But his first effort failed.

Then he chose Mitchell’s Lake south of San Antonio as the site for his new, improved bat roost. All the city’s sewage ran into that area and the mosquitoes were so thick wagons and coaches pulled by horses had to race through or the horses would almost die from loss of blood. This experiment succeeded, and within two years malaria was eliminated from San Antonio and cities all over the southwest hired

Dr. Campbell and his bats to rid their areas of the disease.

In his contract with the cities where he set up his bat towers, complete with hundreds of Mexican free-tailed bats, he promised to keep the bat towers clean of guano, and did so faithfully, selling the guano as fertilizer and literally making millions.

Google has a whole lot of information on flowering plants you can use to annoy mosquitoes to the point where they’ll go somewhere else to find the warm blood they need to make babies.

Repellents make a location (like your yard or skin) less attractive to mosquitoes, but don’t kill them. So, citronella, for example, or DEET, smoke, lemon eucalyptus, lavender, and tea tree oil might keep the insects at bay, but won’t control them or get rid of them in the long run.

Here’s the bottom line in my book about mosquitoes: Yes, they suck your blood, and leave you with itchy bumps and possibly a horrible infection. Mosquito-borne pathogens include malaria, West Nile virus, Zika virus, Chikungunya virus, and dengue. But please don’t fantasize about living in a mosquito-free world; too many of our fellow life forms living, crawling, swimming and flying around us cannot live without them.

If you would like free plans for swallow nesting boxes and day roost for bats, send me an email to jimnaturalist@gmail.com.



PHOTO BY JIM ANDERSON

A female mosquito doing what she does best, plundering we humans for our blood.

**Are You
DYEING
To Try Something
Different?**

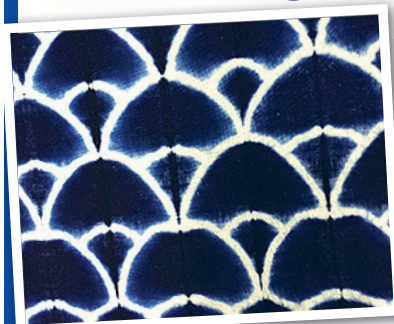
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