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AMAZON TRAIL

Batmuse

*Some of the greatest rewards of country living are perhaps
best kept from city-dwelling house hunters*

by Lee Lynch

Sometimes, when I'm showing our rural home—we've got it on the market—to prospective buyers from, say, the sprawling megalopolis of Los Angeles, I wish I could tell them the whole truth about country living and send them scurrying back to the terrors they know. But we do want to sell our house.

Instead I tell them about the flock of 22 wild turkeys that lives here, the Tom strutting and preening like a tailless peacock while his ladies and kids waddle after him through his kingdom.

I tell them about the deer who, hugely pregnant, lies under the trees to rest and eventually births wobbly twin spotted fawns. "Bambi!" the city slickers inevitably cry.

I tell them about the red shooting stars—wildflowers that blanket this knoll in April—and about lazuli buntings—birds of a striking, unforgettable blue—and about the wild yellow iris that sprinkle the land like jewels.

I tell them about the funny little nuthatches who do gymnastics up and down the trees seeking food. The swallows who moved into the bird house on our deck. For weeks their scrawny young demanded bugs, bugs and more bugs!

I tell them we always know when the baby black-headed grosbeaks have arrived because of

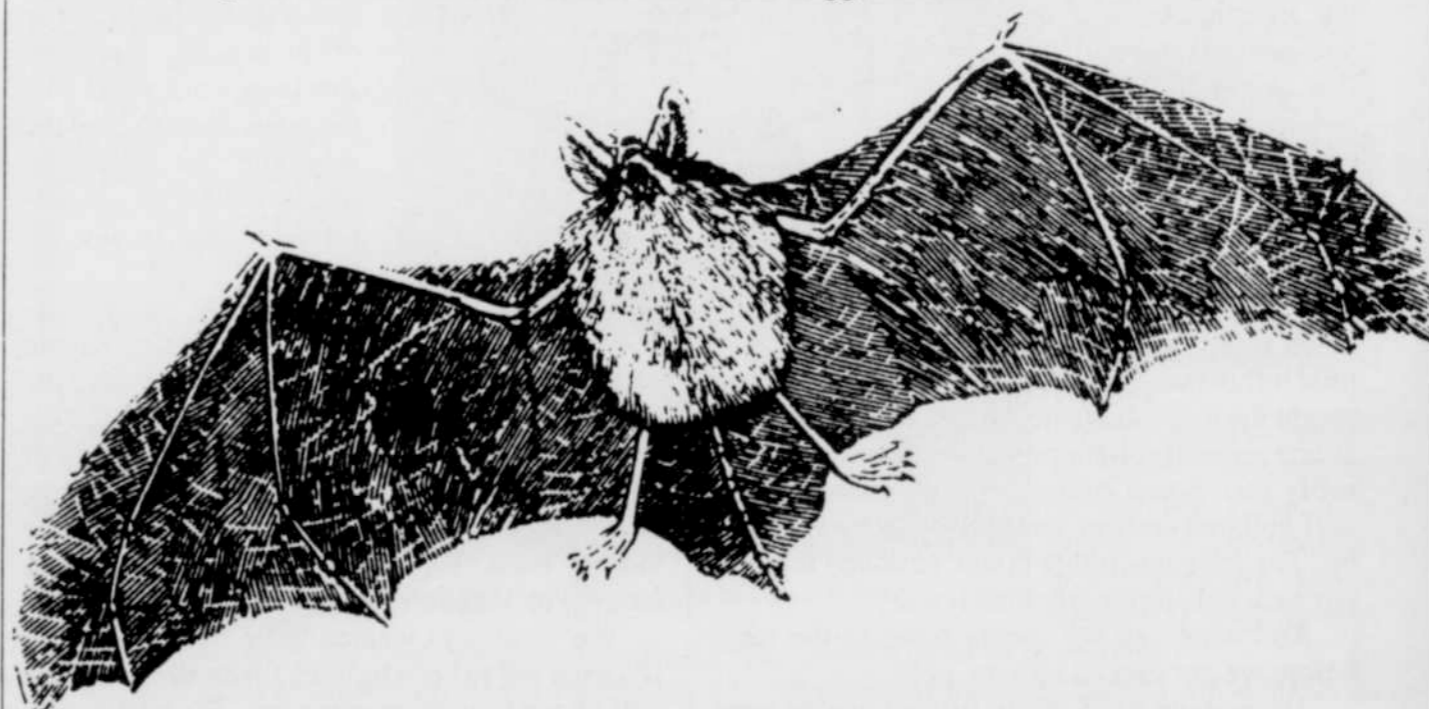
genuine air. Until I drop an undergarment right into a luxuriant patch of poison oak.

Finally, I've got my laptop fired up and am summoning my illusive muse when I hear a commotion in our cold wood stove. It's a bat. A beautiful, lively, furry bat. I grab heavy gloves, a tall French working glass, a cardboard cover and ease the stove door open a crack. I hope bat wings aren't as sensitive as moth wings, and gently grab her. She's unexpectedly compliant, though squeaky, and lets me guide her into the glass and take her outside, where I ease her onto the railing. She sits there for a moment—it's full daylight—then slowly, elegantly flies off into the dark of the woods. And here I thought I was kidding about summoning up a muse.

There are times when Batmuse is less welcome. I'll be reading in bed, Lover drifting off beside me, when a dark quick object dives at us.

"Oh, no," I'll groan.

We turn off all the lights, I put on a hat (just in case) and open the deck door. We drag a floor lamp outside and turn it on, then settle down to wait. Some nights it's a matter of five minutes, others, I start hallucinating bats coming in not out. Eventually our visitor stops feinting at us and finds its way to the lamp. We leap to close the door and stagger to bed.



their constant chorus: "Whee-o, whee-o, whee-o!"

But enough of charms. It's what I don't tell the house shoppers that makes up much of country living. Take today.

I woke at dawn to the sound of finches serenading at incessant boom-box volume, a pileated woodpecker making its raucous Woody Woodpecker song of flight, stellar jays screeching at one another and the cries of dozens of hysterical nuthatches. Easily excited, nuthatches make a sort of muted car horn sound: "Yank, yank, yank." We may as well have garbage collectors rattling cans.

So much for sleep. I got into the shower and noticed a big dark Thing on the wall. Dripping, I removed the spider to the outdoors, which I consider its natural habitat. I have taken so many showers with daddy longlegs and their kin that I hold the honorary title of lifeguard.

I pull the towel over the door only to uncover a wasp. Oh, shit. Being closeted with a Stinging Creature is a little unnerving. The wasp buzzes wildly when I capture and release it. They like to build hives under our eaves, and I periodically stalk the perimeters of the house evicting squatters.

Next, the laundry. I love hanging it outside in

Last year a girl skunk rented the crawl space under our house. This was not good. She was an OK tenant, but in mating season the males really got into protecting her with their own natural critter-repellent, which, when set off under a house, gets kind of hard to live with.

We finally trapped the biggest momma skunk I've ever seen, and then a male, and relocated them about 30 miles from here. We've taken the crawl space off the housing market with heavy gauge screening.

The gray squirrels use every wit they've got in their greedy little heads to get at the bird feeders, but when I see one in summer, belly in the dust, stretched full length like a hot lazy cat, all is forgiven.

They may make a mess on the deck, but listening to the buzz of a swift-winged hummingbird and watching it dip its needle-beak into a feeder or a foxglove, I know I've been given a gift.

Even the skittish little lizards doing push-ups on the woodpile have become precious to me.

The chemical industry would call some of these creatures household pests.

Pesky they may be, and certainly not something I'd mention to a house hunter, but to this city-bred dyke they're not a reason simply to live in the country, but to live.