

Small-Scale Wildlife Adventures

Sleeping long hours is one of the great pleasures of vacationing at the cabin. What could be better than getting into bed and knowing that there is no reason to get back out for eight or nine or even ten hours? Sleeping is as much a part of vacation as fishing and canoeing, as much an indulgence as eating bacon for breakfast and potato chips for lunch – vacation means doing all the things we don't do at home.

My husband likes fishing as much as he likes sleeping. He is willing to sacrifice an hour or two of sleep to get out on the lake early and fish for muskies. That is not for me. Why get up with the sun when we can go fishing later in the morning, or the afternoon, or the evening? We get the same results that hubby gets on his early-morning excursions – no fish. On one recent September morning I woke enough to say something along the lines of, "Good luck," or "Have fun," and went right back to sleep the moment Hubby walked out the door.

I enjoyed another hour of blissful slumber until I was awakened by a noise in the cabin. Although it wasn't a scratching or a scurrying, I knew at once that it was a mouse. I reluctantly got out of bed to see whether the mouse was stealing chestnuts from the basket on the counter or was stuck in a trap. I quickly found the mouse on a sticky trap, optimistically chewing at the plastic in an effort to free itself.

A sticky trap is a small plastic tray, approximately 3 inches by 5 inches by one-quarter inch deep. It is filled with a very sticky substance. When a mouse runs across the surface, it becomes stuck. Sticky traps can also catch voles, spiders, centipedes, and even small snakes – the cabin is a lively place.

The problem with catching a mouse in a sticky trap is having to dispose of a live mouse. I needed to put on some gloves before I was willing to pick up the trap. The gloves were in the shed, so I put on my clothes because it was too cold to go outside in my bathrobe, and I put on my reading glasses so that I could see the tiny numbers on the combination lock on the shed door. I found some gloves that looked bite-proof and went back inside.

I picked up the trap and looked at the mouse. It was as cute as could be. Most mice are cute, but not cute enough to make up for their bad habits of chewing holes in the pillows and leaving their droppings in the kitchen cupboards. I was sorry that I could not free the mouse, and I told it so. Three of its legs and one side of its body were firmly stuck in the adhesive, and I would have caused the mouse serious injury had I attempted to pry it free. Besides, freeing the mouse would have meant catching it again, because it would quickly find its way back into the cabin. The humane thing to do was to take the mouse outside and whack it in the head with a stick, freeing it from all its earthly troubles.

The only problem with this course of action was that I didn't want to kill the mouse. The mouse's suffering would come to an end, but I would feel bad the rest of the day. The obvious solution was to let Hubby kill the mouse when he returned from fishing. I see no harm in occasionally reverting to gender stereotypes. Mice, bats, and snakes are Hubby's province. I put the mouse and its trap on a tree stump, and went inside to enjoy a cup of tea.

The fishing must have been good, because Hubby didn't return for some time. After an hour, I looked out the window and discovered that the mouse had flipped its trap, and was now on the ground with the trap on top. I went out and picked up the trap. To my amazement, the only part of the mouse now stuck to the trap was the tip of its tail. I had

no idea how the mouse had managed to free itself, but it seemed to me that such a hardworking mouse deserved its freedom. I used a stick to push the tail out of the adhesive, and the mouse ran up the nearest tree. I was sorry that I hadn't thought to walk down the road to set the mouse free near someone else's cabin.

When Hubby returned from fishing, I told him the story of the mouse, even though I knew he wouldn't be pleased that the little rodent was still free. Then Hubby told me why he stayed out fishing as long as he did. Three muskies had followed his lure through the water to the boat. Of course, not one of them bit.

That evening, Hubby and I went out in the boat to fish. I caught a musky and Hubby was kind enough to dispose of the snake that lived in the boat. We ended our day in the most perfect way possible, with a long night's sleep.