Wyre Forest Study Group

Outside in

SUSAN LIMBREY

I don't know whether more outdoor creatures come into my house, which I moved into forty-five years ago, than into others. I do have the door open a lot, and the structure of this old stone house is somewhat porous.

Until the last one I saw here, in 2016, Adders frequented the garden, gravid females basking all summer, and males warming up on and under refuges. The earliest close encounter came when I was dozing in the sun on a warm brick path against the house wall. I moved my feet, heard a hiss, and there was an Adder coiled beside me. To avoid a numb bum I stood up very, very slowly and stepped away very, very carefully, and she retreated into a hole in the wall. On two occasions female Adders came into the living room, once when the sun went off the step where she was basking and she retreated through the open glass door, and the other time I had been showing a visitor where she was curled up against the house. She must have become shy and sought privacy by coming through the front door, across the hall and into the living room. The first was gently guided with a broom back the way she came; the second needed a very long stick to persuade her out from under furniture and over the door sill.

Birds are the most frequent visitors. To Robins, Blue Tits and Wrens, the hairy carpet tiles in the hall seem to offer foraging opportunities and then they come further in. A Grey Wagtail flew in once and a Jackdaw was surprised to find itself inside the wood-burner. The latest was a Tree Creeper, which, instead of flying out, landed on the floor with its back to the open glass door, then leapt up and clung onto my leg. I had to step some way outside with this very beautiful passenger on board before it would fly off.

I used to have Pipistrelles flying around my bed at night but, though there are plenty around, they don't do that nowadays. 'Kitchen Bat', though, has been a regular visitor for many years, detected only by its droppings, always under the same beam. It has defied all of Steve Horton's attempts with his very special equipment to record its sonograms or get an Infra-red photograph. The shiny, knobbly droppings are characteristic of the Brown Long-eared Bat. This species' echolocation is only a whisper as it picks its prey off surfaces, but anyway there is no evidence that it forages indoors, and perhaps it would not be making contact calls when alone indoors. I once crept down in the night and got a very brief glimpse before it flew off.

I don't mind the inevitable Wood Mice and Yellow-necked Mice which come in, though I wish they wouldn't steal the soap, but Rats I do object to, especially when they eat bananas and take apples from the fruit bowl. This only happened last Spring, and I think I have thwarted their means of access. Many years ago, having breakfast one day I was surprised to see a Weasel emerge from under furniture. I think I had interrupted a hunt: there had been scrabbling sounds from mice in the stink-pipe housing that comes down through the house, and the Weasel went back the way it must have come, into a gap at the bottom. I once found a Shrew indoors, and the latest mammal visitor was a Grey Squirrel, which poked its head round the living room door. There was no door or window open, and it can only have got in and out via a chimney.

A puzzling phenomenon is the invasion of tiny froglets, and sometimes toadlets, which seem compelled to travel uphill and westwards. There is no breeding site within half a mile, and I have seen them clambering up through tussocks in the very steep field between a little brook and the garden, and heading through the garden towards the front door, which is in an angle of the house. Until I twigged what was going on and pulled a mat away so that the step was too high for them to jump or clamber up, a narrow gap under the door gave them access and they ended up in the living room, dozens at time, the froglets especially being the very devil to catch.

There are, of course, a lot of insects coming in and, usually, out, but less expected ones have included a Lesser Stag Beetle and a Sexton Beetle, and it was nice to find a Lime Hawk Moth in my bedroom. Hornets sometimes nest in the roof, and one year their dispersal brought many hundreds through the fabric of the house into the downstairs loo. As for those spiders which should live outside, some individuals choose a more sheltered existence, among them *Pisaura mirabilis* which likes to live on the stairs, and a funnel-web spider *Agelena labyrinthia* which spent several weeks last autumn filling the living room window area with a maze of very long threads funnelling down to its tubular retreat behind a stack of books. The prospect of visitors compelling me to do some housework, I had to evict her, and found the retreat contained an egg sac, but after careful relocation outside, she departed and the eggs appeared not to contain embryos.

What next, I wonder? I hope it is not the Pheasant which peers in through the window and is often on the doorstep. He follows me round the garden, crooning softly.



Adder *Vipera berus* inside Susan's house. Susan Limbrey