**Audio Transcript – Bat Out of Hell Ranch**

*Note: Episodes of Outside/In are made as pieces of audio, and some context and nuance may be lost on the page. Transcripts are generated using a combination of speech recognition software and human transcribers, and may contain errors.*

**NH: Hey this is Outside/In, I’m Nate Hegyi.**

**This summer, I moved into a house on five acres on the Rocky Mountain Front… and I’m telling you, it is *wild.***

*[wind sound]*

**The wind sometimes gusts at hurricane forces. There are wolves in the mountains nearby.**

*[wolves howling in the distance]*

**And like anybody who lives out in the boonies or the backwoods knows, things are *always* trying to get in.**

*[funny/creepy mux]*

**We have mice in the barn. Wasps that sneak in through the cracks in the window sills.**

**A few weeks ago, my wife and I, were tucked into bed… middle of the night… when suddenly I woke up to the sound of fluttering wings.**

**At first I thought it was a big moth. There are lot of moths here.**

**I turned on the lights…and it was a bat…**

**And before I could do anything about it the bat found a little hole underneath a wooden beam and disappeared.**

***Into the house.***

*Nate field tape:  So I want to see how many bats are living in my house. I think there's bat… white bat guano on my window…  I can hear him like clicketyclacking. So I'm going to go try to see if I can see him.*

**Sure enough, underneath a loose piece of siding on my house, there was a whole colony of bats staring out at me.**

*Nate field tape: You can see their little bat pee flowing down one shingle. There’s like twenty of them in there. That’s crazy.*

***[mux swell]***

**There’s some kind of internal alarm that sets off when you discover a wild animal in your home…**

*News clip: It’s a scene straight out of a horror film.*

**… a sudden urge to batten down the hatches, and wage war against the intruders.**

*News clip: A rabid bad was found near Reed Market and 3rd street….*

**But what if there’s another way?**

**Today on Outside/In, my new house provides the perfect fodder for a very Halloween-y dilemma.**

**Should I send these nocturnal nuisances back from whence they came?**

*News clip: A New Hampshire man says he was surprised to suddenly feel a bite on his hand…*

**Or… should I embrace my inner Bruce Wayne… and learn to love the bat?**

**Stay tuned**

*[sound of bats rises, mux swells, and then fades]*

**So I should say… At the beginning of this journey, I fell squarely in the “get rid of the bats” camp.**

**I grew up in a house full of bats.**

**my mom secretly cleaned up mounds of bat poop - known as guano - from my sister’s closet.**

**And they creeped me out.**

*[MUX]*

**It  Doesn’t help that in a lot of western societies, bats are considered scary.**

**The Old Testament of the bible calls them unclean animals. In the Middle Ages, they were considered friends of the devil.**

**And when  Spanish conquistadors discovered an actual bat that fed on the blood of the living – the vampire bat – well, the image stuck.**

*Dracula Clip: I am… Dracula. And I bid you welcome Mr. Harcourt to my house.*

**But for everything that is scary about depictions of bats… there is also a sense of mystery, and awe.**

**I mean, they basically have a super-power… echolocation. They eat bugs, which is great. They even have a human mascot.**

*[Montage of clips saying “I’m Batman!”]*

**So when thousands of bats take off from a cave in Costa Rica or from their roost underneath a bridge in Austin, Texas, people don’t run away screaming. They  flock from all over the world to watch.**

*Video clip: It’s unbelievable! There’s so many!*

**But when they’re taking off from your house… it’s a different story.**

*Nate field tape: All right. I'm going outside in the morning to clean up the bat poop on the window.*

**I am a bit of a neat freak.**

*Nate field tape: There’s a spiderweb. Creepy…*

**Which is not an easy thing to be when you’re living on the prairie for the first time.**

*Nate field tape:  I wonder if I should be wearing a mask or something…*

**My wife Christine doesn’t have this same problem - she is totally unperturbed by the bats.**

*Christine: What are you doing?*

*NH: I'm cleaning the bat poop off the window.*

*Oh, gross. I can see it. There's little chunks of it in there. Ew! Ew! Ew!*

**Cleanup aside, I had no idea how concerned I should be. So  I called this local pest control company.**

*[Ring, ring]*

**A guy picked up. He called himself… no joke… Batman bruce.**

*Nate talking into the phone: So we’ve got a colony of, well, there’s about 20 bats living in the siding of our house. They’re outside of the house…*

[mux]

**He told me… you DO NOT want bats in there. They can devalue your property. Make the place stink from their poop and pee. Now, he wouldn’t kill them. That’s actually illegal in most states. Instead, he’d just exclude them with stuff like wire mesh.**

**I hung up, and texted Batman Bruce some pictures of the house so he could send me a quote to get them out of there.**

**then I went online and googled “bats in the house.”**

*Clip: We’ve got some bats nesting here. They are alive.*

**And all of these pest control videos - they make bat guano sound like asbestos.**

*Clip This stuff will kill you… It creates a lot of dust so you have to be careful.*

**And technically, this is all true. Bat guano can carry  a fungal disease called Histoplasmosis.**

*Clip: Ten years in Ponoco, Donna Red found a dead bat in her basement vent and vacuumed out the droppings. “I had developed severe muscle pain, dehydration, joint pain..”*

**Then there’s the  rabies.**

*Clip: Now a dog owner discovered their pet playing with the bat and called the…*

**The CDC says bat bites are the number one way people get rabies. …**

*Clip: Tonight a woman bitten by a bat with rabies near downtown last week said she cannot afford medical treatment…*

[mux crescendoes then fades]

**Video after video, I found myself I spiraling down an internet rabbit hole.**

**.**

**You know how when you’ve got a weird cramp and you go onto WebMD and suddenly you’re worried that  cramp is actually a sign that you have cancer and are dying… well, I kinda did that with the bats.**

**I was getting paranoid about guano dust. Wondering how to tell if any of my house bats had rabies.**

**But then this internet rabbit hole – or maybe I should call it a bat cave – led me to an unexpected place.**

**A country where bats aren’t considered dangerous…. And if they wind up living in your siding… you *cannot* kick them out.**

**That’s coming up, right after the break. But first, are you dressing up for halloween? Are you going to be an opossum, are you going to be a prong-horn antelope? I dunno why I would bring up a prong-horn antelope… They’re not even a Halloween animal!**

**Anyway, if you or someone you know is planning to dress up as an animal, or some outdoor-related costume, we would LOVE to see it… or if you’ve got any last minute ideas, send em our way.**

**Send us photos and costume tips AD LIB – send us pictures at** **outsidein@nhpr.org****- and we will be sure to feature them in our FREE newsletter.**

**Alright, be right back.**

**BREAK**

**You’re listening to Outside/In, I’m Nate Hegyi. I want to imagine you live in England. You’ve got a cute little cottage in the countryside. Maybe even a thatched roof.**

**But then you discover, up in your attic… is a massive colony of bats.**

[SCARY MUX]

**Oh, no… don’t cue the scary music here. Actually pick the happy music…**

[HAPPY MUX]

**Perfect. Because you aren’t angry about these bats… you are elated.**

*Steph Holt: I've lived in houses a number of times that have had bats roosting in them. I've been really lucky in that way to have my own private bat roosts.*

**That’s Steph Holt. She is a bat specialist at the Natural History Museum in London.**

*Steph Holt:  A lot of my time, I spend convincing people that bats are not scary, they are fascinating and absolutely adorable.*

**Okay, so maybe people in England are still squeamish about bats, but they they are protected by *law*.**

*Steph Holt: That means you can't kill, injure, capture, take any bats, but you also can't damage, destroy or obstruct their roost under the terms of the legislation.*

**It all traces back to some BIG changes in british society. Changes in how people farmed - AND how people lived.**

*Steph Holt: We tore out huge swathes of hedgerows. Hedgerows were critically important because bats will use hedgerows as navigational features to help them navigate around the landscape in the dark using echolocation. So that was a dramatic change.*

*We changed how we managed our livestock using huge amounts of wormers in cattle and sheep particularly, and of course where our bats are insectivorous.**Anything that changes insect populations is going to have a dramatic effect.*

[MUX RISE AND FADE]

**Plus, The U.K. is roughly eight times more densely populated than the U.S. That means more cars, city lights, housing developments – the kind of things that can destroy habitat and kill bats.**

**Because of these changes, bats were dying left and right in the UK. Some species – like the greater horseshoe bat – saw a 90 percent decline in their population.**

**So in 80s and early 90s,  parliament passed strict protections for bats, birds and other imperiled species. Now, if you try and kick them out of your house, you can get a fine of up to 5,000 pounds… per bat.**

**So in England, if you DO discover a bat in your attic…**

*Steph Holt: The normal first recourse for a householder will be to get a volunteer bat worker out to come and have a look and see if there are bats, potentially see what bats there are, and to give some initial advice about any concerns that the householder might have, the intention really is to keep the bats in situ, keep the roost there. By and large, they're doing very, very little damage, if anything at all, and causing next to no risk to anybody.*

**“No risk to anybody… “**

[MUX]

**What’s weird, is that this flies in the face of all the stuff I saw when I was spiralling online… those horror videos of dangerous guano and bats biting dudes in the neck.**

**So should I try and get rid of them? Or, should I be like the British, and just leave my bat B n B as is?**

[MUX rise and fade]

**I was at a  crossroads. And till waiting, for Batman Bruce to text me back with a quote.**

**So in the meantime, I got ahold of an American bat biologist named Susan Tsang. Susan is a total bat nerd.**

*Susan Tsang: sometimes just only watch Survivor to see what bats they have. Like they show these shots of wildlife // And it's a good way for me to just check which islands have what species of things.*

**Susan works  at the American Natural History Museum. when she isn’t traveling internationally studying fruit bats, she lives with her parents in Queens.**

*Nate Hegyi: So in terms of just like trying to be a good person with bats, like what should I do? Like if you were in my shoes, what would you do?*

*Susan Tsang:  I think. I mean, I'm of the mind that like, if it's just, if it's completely outside in your house and it's not even there's not even like it's in the siding, it's not even anywhere near the interior of your house and it can't get in. There's no attic or anything for it to get into or anything like that. I kind of think it's okay to leave them alone because I don't really see them being harmful to people.*

[MUX]

**So let’s talk about all the stuff that originally freaked me about the bats. For one, that guano that everyone was warning about?**

*Susan Tsang: No, guano is really good actually, as a nutrient for things. We fought wars over getting guano from birds and bats. So…*

**This is true, by the way. Spain fought a bloody war over guano in South America in the 19th century and the U.S. annexed over 100 islands in the south pacific… all to get bat or seabird guano for use as fertilizer.**

*Susan Tsang: It’s very nutrient rich. It's full of tons of nitrogen because they're eating all these bugs. Right? And they they have the bits of them in there. Right? So they, they end up being actually really, really good.*

**As for its health dangers…guano can be dangerous.  But so are a lot of other types of animal poop… if you eat them.**

*Susan Tsang: Really the biggest problem I think people are worried about, oh, it's going to poop on my head and it's a problem. I'm like, Oh, well, birds poop on your head also, and all you do is just wash it off and call it a day.*

**This is something that Steph Holt, the English bat expert, told me as well. She said the risk of getting sick from the droppings:**

*Steph Holt: Again. it's very, very minor. I mean, and you would have to be going into areas of huge volumes of droppings to create enough dust from old droppings to to be able to breathe it in anyway. And certainly in the UK our, our bat roosts just don't get to that sort of scale.*

**Here in the U.S., less than a thousand people every year get histoplasmosis. And that’s from both bat AND bird droppings.**

**As for rabies? Again, it happens - but  we’re talking 3 people a year in the U.S.**

*Susan Tsang:  if you go up to them and you grab one, you know, for some reason and then it feels like it is afraid, then of course it's going to bite you because it's a wild animal that is suddenly afraid. And so it has a response which is to defend itself. Yeah, so of course it's gonna bite you. But if you leave them alone, there's no reason for the bats to come after you in any way. It’s a coexisting kind of thing you know.*

**Susan has worked in a lot of different countries. She says this fear of bats isn’t just an American thing… it’s worldwide.**

*Susan Tsang: There's a shared global modernity culture that we all have that even though in some places the traditional culture is to not be afraid of bats and to associate them with positive things, some people are not necessarily aware of that. And and that's because they're not used to like being near nature.*

**I count myself in this group.**

**I mean, I *love* animals - in theory. I’m the host of a show called Outside/In, for goodness sake.**

**But out here - living for the first time in such a rural part of the country - It feels like I’m waging a war of exclusion ALL the time.**

**Like I am *literally* doing everything in my power to keep the outside from getting in.**

**What I can’t tell, is if I need to loosen up and get used to it - or double down, and batten up the hatches.**

**PAUSE, sound fades up**

*Nate’s Mom: Bats, ugh.*

*[Batman theme starts playing in the background]*

*Nate Hegyi: I was looking at them with binoculars, with the light? There’s like twenty of them.*

*Nate’s Mom: Really, where?!*

*Nate Hegyi: Oh, on the side of the house.*

**One night, my mom and dad came over for a campfire outside. The bats were swooping around the house, eating mosquitoes and moths… and my Dad was lording over the bluetooth speaker.**

*Christine: Is this Meatloaf?*

*Nate’s Dad: Yeah, but this song is important.*

*Nate Hegyi: Is this Bat Out of Hell?*

*Nate’s Dad: Totally is.*

**I had pulled out my mic so I could complain about the bats for this story, and get their take. But my Dad - he wasn’t hearing it. Aside from being a Meatloaf fan… he was on the bat’s side.**

*Christine: This is our theme song.*

*Nate Hegyi: Bat out of Hell Ranch. That's what it is. Bat out of Hell Ranch. That'd be a good name for it.*

*FADE OUT*

**A few weeks after this fire, the bats actually left on their own. They migrated away when the temperatures dropped.**

**Turns out I didn’t need the help from Batman bruce.**

**But as soon as they were gone… I realized I kind of missed them. Especially because of something bat biologist Susan Tsang told me.**

**bats in the northern U.S. are in trouble. They are facing a pandemic of their own… called white nose syndrome.**

*Susan Tsang: So white nose syndrome is a fungus that basically invaded into the US. It probably mutated from a fungus in Europe and it was probably on the shoes of people who do caving.*

**It strikes when bats are hibernating.**

*Susan Tsang: The fungus, what it does is basically it's kind of like takes up all the bats, like, you know, energy, like by sucking all those fat resources, basically. Right. And so that is like going to wake up because it thinks like, Oh, I'm hungry right now.Probably a spring. Got to go get some food. And it flies out and it's still winter and there's no food and then they die.*

**White nose syndrome has killed millions of bats in North America. Scientists consider it one of the worst wildlife diseases in modern times. And it just popped up here in Montana in 2021. And if a bat cave becomes infected with white nose, the bats often don’t go back.**

[Mux]

**So now, instead of trying to evict the bats - I’ve got a new plan. I’m going to try and lure them back by building them their own vacation rental in a corner of my property. A bat house.**

*Susan Tsang: They look like very thin mailboxes.*

**She said if I closed up the siding on my home and built one further away, they might actually like it better.**

*Susan Tsang: It's very quiet. There's no lights around there. And so, yeah, sometimes when bats do migrate, they'll find the new place and they'll just stay there. Cool. // or it might be a good way for you to attract even more bats because you're in the middle of a plain and there's nothing, nowhere else to live, you know? So you might be putting up another beacon or another bat signal for the bats to stay in this little place.*

**My plan is to build the bat house above my compost pile. That way their guano – the nitrogen-rich poop that countries fought *wars* over – can eventually fertilize my garden.**

**And! They’ll also keep eating all those frickin’ moths and flies that keep invading my house.**

**Because even though I’m still learning to live with nature… I’m good without all the  bugs.**

[MUX]

**Have you ever had bats in your house? What did you do? Shoot us an email at** **outsidein@nhpr.org** **– we might even include your response in our newsletter, which comes out every couple of weeks and gives you some behind-the-scenes looks at how we make our episodes.**

**Also, you can get yourself an Outside/in hat and ginkgo sticker when you donate just $5 bucks a month to keep the show going. That’s like less than a bag of Halloween candy these days.**

**There’s a link in the show notes.**

**This episode was written and produced by me, Nate Hegyi.**

**It was edited and mixed by Taylor Quimby. Our team includes Justine Paradise and Felix Poon.**

**Rebecca Lavoie is the Director of On Demand Audio at NHPR.**

**Music by blue dot sessions.**

**Our theme music is by breakmaster cylinder.**

**O/I is a production of New Hampshire Public Radio.**