

More bugs mean more bats in Lincoln

By Sean McCarthy
Staff Reporter

Winged black creatures have become more visible around Lincoln, an animal control official said.

Jim Weverka, manager of Lincoln's Animal Control Center, said that because of increases in mosquito and other insect populations in Lincoln, bat sightings have become a common complaint during the last month.

Weverka said his center had received about one call every night regarding bats in people's homes. That brings the number of bat calls to about 30 this month, he said.

Bats consume an enormous number of small insects; the average bat consumes more than 1,000 small insects a night, Weverka said.

The high volume of insects in Lincoln also makes it easier for bats to reproduce, he said. With so much food, bats have more energy for reproduction, he said.

Weverka said bats are most commonly sighted in attics. Windows that are left open at night or have poor screens attract bats, Weverka said. However, a bat can enter through an opening the size of a dime, Weverka said.

"Bats are easily attracted to open windows because of small insects that might be flying around in the light," Weverka said.

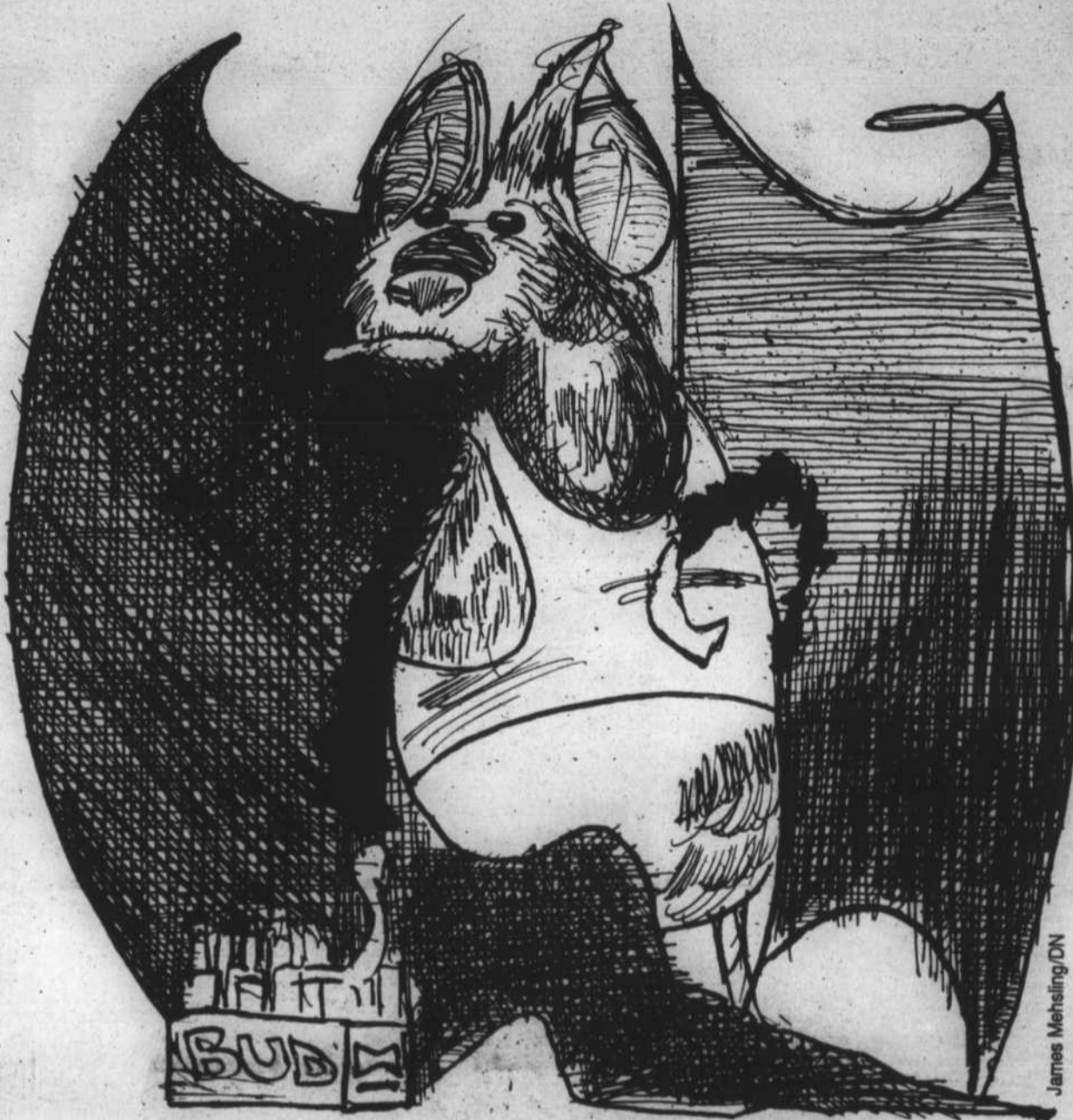
When a bat enters an area, the best thing to do is close as many entrances as possible, Weverka said. Using bright lights is a good way to repel bats from an attic or house, Weverka said.

"There are other ways to get bats out of their environment, such as music and mothballs, but I'm not too sure on the effectiveness of these methods," he said.

Because bats may carry rabies, Weverka said people should use extreme caution when removing a bat from a house, Weverka said. People should remove pets from the area to prevent them from getting rabies, he said.

The chance of a bat spreading rabies is low, Weverka said. For the most part, bats are harmless animals that are not prone to attack people or animals, Weverka said.

Weverka said people who didn't want to deal with bats could call the Animal Control Center for assistance.



The center is available 24 hours a day, he said.

Weverka said the center had methods to ensure bats were removed without harm.

Once the bat is removed from the area, it usually is released in the wild immediately, Weverka said. If the bat has attacked a person, it will be held for a rabies test, he said.

In some instances, bats too sick to be released are taken to the Wildlife Rescue Unit, he said.

Linda Branum, member of the board of directors for the Wildlife Rescue Unit, said adult bats were fed for a few days until they were ready to be released.

"Infant bats that we care for often become domesticated, even friendly,"

Branum said.

Branum said she hoped the rise of bats in the area would stimulate interest about the creatures, not fear.

"Due to the large amount of insects they consume, it is a tremendous benefit to have bats in an area," Branum said. "They do a tremendous service to the community."

Chirping crickets swarm in Midwest in big numbers

By Jeff Randall
Staff Reporter

People throughout the Midwest may have been hearing the pitter-patter of little feet lately.

The only problem is the insects attached to these feet have been chirping — all night long.

Jim Kalisch, an entomologist at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, said crickets, particularly striped ground crickets, had been swarming in Lincoln and Omaha in large numbers recently. And most of the residents — the human residents, anyway — are not pleased.

Ron Johnson of Bug Man-Ron's Pest Control, 2700 S. 35th St., said his business had received hundreds of calls about the cricket crisis, both from homeowners and store owners.

"The stores have been getting swarms of the crickets around their lights and entryways. It has become a big problem for them," he said.

"Lots of people are as afraid of crickets as they are of snakes," he said.

Kalisch said the crickets flocked to outdoor lights at night to feed on other insects, and during the day they sought refuge inside homes, offices and any other places they could find.

Cricket populations are cyclical in nature. This year, though, has seen a considerable increase, Kalisch said.

"Several factors are involved in the population size, and it's hard to tell which specific ones are responsible," he said.

Among the possible reasons Kalisch gave for the cricket increase this year were mild winters, cool summers, abundant plant growth and natural rise-and-fall patterns in population.

Crickets do little or no damage to property, but many people are annoyed by their late-night chirping.

That chirping occurs when the cricket matures. The noise primarily is a mating call. While in the mating stages, crickets tend to gather in large congregations, and the noise level increases.

Homeowners wishing to eliminate their cricket problems have several options. Moving firewood, fallen lumber and potted plants away from the outside of houses may lessen the problem.

Because outdoor lights attract the insects, keeping lights off or switching bulbs from white to yellow light also may help, Kalisch said.

More serious considerations are pesticide sprays such as Sevin or granules such as Dursban and dianizon.

If none of these alternatives sound tempting, Kalisch also recommended mammal intervention.

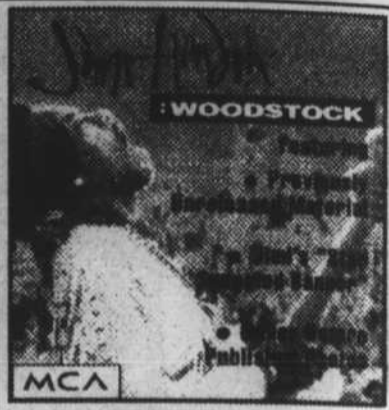
"Several animals feed on the crickets. I believe a pet skunk in the front yard would end any insect problems relatively quickly," he said.

Kalisch said those who were willing to brave out the cricket crisis didn't have long to wait. Most cricket population explosions last only from two to four weeks.

The first freeze takes care of the rest.



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