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HOMEMAKERS' CHAT

Tuesday, June 27, 1939

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

SUBJECT: "QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS." Information from the Bureau of Biological Survey
United States Department of Agriculture.

--ooOoo--

Here's Tuesday again, the day when your questions come up for answers from the scientists. This week, as it happens, the mailbag contains letters asking questions about bats, rats, cats, and canaries.

The first question is about the world's only flying mammal--the bat: "What is the truth about bats?," writes a homemaker. "I have always been afraid of bats and believed that they were dangerous creatures to have around. But my son came home from school the other day and informed me that bats are harmless and also very useful because they eat so many destructive insects. I'd like to know whether this is true."

Answer: Biological Survey scientists agree with your son. They say that our native bats are among the most harmless of creatures in spite of the fact that they have always been associated with witchcraft and sorcery and other ancient superstitions. Bats are very useful, too, because they eat a great quantity of night-flying insects which they catch on the wing. Their diet includes mosquitoes, codling moths and other insects very destructive to crops and gardens. So the biologists say that you should never kill bats unless they have become a nuisance by establishing a roost in your house or barn.

The chief objection to bats is that they are not neat housekeepers. Their roosts always have a strong unpleasant odor. Then, too, the scratching, scrambling noises that they make just at dawn when they are coming back to roost from their nights out catching insects are disturbing to anyone in the house who is trying to sleep.

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If bats have taken up quarters in your attic or chimney or between the walls of your house, the way to get rid of them permanently is to close up any openings that let them in. You can tack strips of metal or wood over open cracks or plug up small places with paper or cloth. Of course, you don't want to close the bats inside the house. So close up all but a few openings by day and finish the last few a week or so later after dark when the bats are out.

This information and much more about bats you will find in a Department of Agriculture leaflet - Leaflet No. 109 called "Eliminating Bats from Buildings." It is free as long as the supply lasts. You can have a copy by sending a postcard to the Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C.

The second question coming up for answer today is about rats. The biologists feel very differently about rats from the way they feel about bats. While they consider the bat harmless and useful, they consider the rat man's worst animal enemy. They haven't a single kind word to say about rats. Rats carry disease and are a serious menace to public health. Beside this, they cost this country a fortune every year in the crops they destroy, the chickens they kill and all the other damage they do. So naturally the biologists are glad to send information to anyone who wants to get rid of rats.

Now here's the question about rats in one of the week's letters: "Is there any rat poison that is not dangerous to dogs and other animals, or to children, if they should happen to get hold of it?"

Answer: Red squill powder has proved to be an effective poison for rats and is relatively harmless to human beings and domestic animals. To make rat bait, mix about an ounce of red squill powder with a pound of fresh ground fish, or meat, or cereal mush, or some other food tempting to rats. Before you put out this bait, be sure that all other food is out of the reach of rats. Cover all garbage cans tightly, empty food hoppers, and put food supplies in tight containers. The best

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time to put out the freshly prepared bait is the late afternoon so that it will be fresh when the rats go out to feed. Remember that a large number of small baits here and there are more effective against rats than a few large baits.

You will find further directions for controlling the rats with red squill and by gassing and trapping in Farmers' Bulletin No. 1533 called "Rat Control." Just write to the Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C. for "Rat Control," Farmers' Bulletin No. 1533.

Now here's a question about cats: "Please tell me just how useful a cat is against rats and mice."

Answer: The biologists say that cats that are of real value as ratters are rare. And the cat you hope will get rid of rats will probably do more harm than good by killing a great number of valuable birds around your property. However, if you keep a cat confined in a warehouse, or produce depot, or similar place in cities where rats and mice are a nuisance, the cat may be of considerable help in destroying these pests. The biologists say that a good rat dog, however,-- a small terrier taught to hunt by itself is almost indispensable on farms where old building offer ideal quarters for rats.

Last question: "Where can I get reliable information on the proper care of a canary bird?"

Answer: Write to the Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C. for Farmers' Bulletin No. 1327 called "Canaries, Their Care and Management." This bulletin also is free as long as the supply lasts.

That's all the questions today. Whether you want information on bats, rats, or canaries, you are welcome to Department of Agriculture publications on the subject.

