

On being a farm wife - And other hazards

Joyce Bupp



Even if the leaves weren't beginning to show hints of color, even if the cattails weren't ripening, even if the unmistakable fragrance of freshly-cut silage corn didn't perfume the air, we would know anyway.

We would know what time of the year it is by the invasion. The "critters" are invading our

house.

Breakfast was nearly over on a recent early morning when a shrill, screeching sound shattered the quiet of the kitchen.

A cricket? In the kitchen? Usually at least one serenades us each fall from the basement, after the first cool night or two sends these friendly "bugs" in search of a

more protected environment.

This noisy one was singing its heart out from behind the microwave oven. As long as I stayed more than a few feet away, the shrill calling persisted. Any closer, and the cricket sensed my presence and clammed up.

It didn't really have to worry. Crickets in the house are supposed to bring good luck, we've always heard. After the year's combined record low milk prices and continuing lack of feed crops, the welcome mat is out for an invasion of good-luck-bearing crickets.

Instead, we've got one cricket and an army of at least a thousand spiders pursuing our innocent singer with booby trap webs. Not content to weave their snares behind the microwave, the army has strung webs all over the house.

One spidery battalion has a field camp set up behind the door to the back porch - just in case the cricket is bold enough to march through the normal entrances to

the house.

Hasn't worked on a cricket yet, but it occasionally ensnarles one of us.

A whole brigade lies in wait in the upper corners of the living room, with spies stashed in and around the white ruffled curtains at the windows. Operations controls are from web clusters at every level of the bookshelf. And raiding bands haunt the shadows of the second floor stairway, web-weaving round-the-clock.

While crickets and spiders seek indoor refuge, some of our more domesticated species invade with summer's-end population explosions.

Formerly-plump mother cats have gone slim as they raise nests of late-season kittens. One chose a deep hole in a big, round bale, a cozy hay-cave some cow had nibbled out, in which to deliver a litter of three tiny kittens. Another opted for the wagon shed, where the wobbly-legged, chubby-bellied babies now peek out shyly while we bottle-feed our overflow of heifer babies from the calf nursery.

The feed room where silage is run has been taken over by the second hatch from our lone mother hen. After losing every one of her June chicks to a couple of determined barn cats, she

promptly laid back on the job.

Wiser this time around, the old white hen corrals her eight fluffy babies (seven black and one cream-colored) where there is feed in abundance and no tall weeds for cat cover. She also has enlisted the parenting protection of the big, old rooster, who would gleefully peck a hunk of fur from the head of any cat, given an opportunity.

And after repeated settings on fruitless eggs, one guinea hen has finally managed to produce and raise one brown-speckled offspring. It's as swift and elusive as a baby pheasant, which it resembles except for larger size, and we only get glimpses of it occasionally.

Waning summer spurs a rush to get things done, including perpetuation of the species by critters hunting mates and homes. Apparently the microwave cricket found neither. Next morning it was meandering around a couple of dishes left in the kitchen sink. I put the leggy, black insect back outside and headed downstairs for my barn shoes.

The shrill screeching sound of a cricket greeted me - in the basement.

It must have sneaked right back inside. Probably with all the mice coming home from their vacations.

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