

Best New Year's wishes from Team Vanderlips

Aside from those good wishes we extend to one another on the occasion of a new year — Gregorian (2011) or lunar (Year of the Rabbit in China, Year of the Cat in Vietnam; somewhere Al Stewart is smiling) — our thoughts naturally turn to squirrel-infestation.

Indeed, our furry friends, and the desire to permanently evict them from our home and office, dominated last half of 2010 here at Camp Vanderlips. To recap, our family has a long and tortured history vis a vis both the common gray squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*) and the smaller, even more rodent-like flying squirrel (*Glaucomys sabrinus*). When we lived in Portland, we had gray squirrels in the walls; as our place was brick, they had entered through the roof cavity, specifically, where a piece of exterior molding had rotted away, revealing a veritable royal road into our home for these urban interlopers. We trapped a few via the vaunted “Have-a-Heart” trap, having secured them to the roof and baited them with peanut butter (chunky). Thereafter, still hewing to the effete, left-leaning urban sophisticate idiom we inhabited, at that time, we dutifully transported them, live, to our place of work 15 miles north, where we released them to go and make someone else’s life miserable.

Upon moving to New Gloucester, a ways out in the woods, we encountered more persistent squirrel issues and gradually our political correctness in this area fell away. First, in the house, which is sheathed entirely of barn board, we discovered several years back that flying squirrels has chewed through the south façade and taken up residence in the walls of the master bedroom. We trapped them out of their ill-gotten lair, ultimately, using the “Have-a-Heart” affixed to said façade, over the hole, so they could come out (into the trap) but not get back out/in.

It was here the relationship took a more pointed, some would say sadistic turn.



Clockwise from top right: Trajan still going at 15; The Vineyard for a week in August; Menemsha hike on MV; Intra-mammal trash talking at Xmas – ‘twas the season.



Upon consultation with a locally renowned animal rehab specialist, it was agreed the woods are full of squirrels who, like bats, colonize their dens with extended family. It was also suggested that (unlike bats, who pitch in by eating bugs) squirrels add little to the eco-system and perhaps there would be no long-term negative impact in reducing the population. In fact, given the physical damage squirrels wreak upon a home, reducing the population seemed not only desirable but just. This we did, only to have others return 2 years later via a different tiny hole they gnawed on the north side of the house. Eventually I found that hole, plugged it (with an old baby food jar), removed the wooden patch, which had covered the old south-facing hole, and re-affixed the trap. Bingo. This time, utterly jaded, I removed the trap, kept the interlopers sealed therein and, well, said goodbye to the squirrels.

As some of you may know, we have a barn at Camp Vanderlips, where I keep an office. At some stage concurrent with the flying squirrel issues in the house, say 4 years ago, I began hearing the familiar skittering associated with a squirrel in the barn walls, as well. Sure enough, a gray bastard had chewed a fist-sized hole in the façade; before I could even find the trap and get busy, he had chewed his way through the dry wall into my office, apparently not far enough to practically access Mandarin Media's nerve center, but far enough to have pushed pink insulation ahead of him. He left a small pile of it on the floor, 8 feet beneath the hole. How else to interpret this act as anything but brazen gauntlet-laying? So I trapped his ass, drowned him in the frog pond, patched the hole and went about my business. Another victory for higher mammals.



Clockwise from top right: Camp V is Quilt Central; The view from Gay Head; Kitchen make-over in the spring; Dirt Driveway lays one down; Halloween 2010.

This catches you up to 2010. Sometime this summer, in the barn, I began to hear the skittering again, though I could not find the point of entry. The façade still featured the intact wooden patch I had placed over the old hole, and while the squirrels had definitely been gnawing away at the seams between barn-board planks right beside the old hole (they are creatures of habit; once they get in, even the kin or neighborhood varmints want back into the same exact spots... must be the smell), I could not find any portal. As such, I began searching the underside of my second-floor office. This “ceiling” to the first floor of the barn isn’t finished. It’s insulated and Tyveked; I couldn’t find anything but surely this is where they were getting in.

About this time, sometime in the fall, I was sitting in the house, in our Great Room. It was a Saturday or Sunday. I heard the skittering emanating not from the bedroom wall but from an area above the Great Room windows, about 15 feet up on the south-facing walls... Surely they were just chewing on the house, as squirrels and countless others species *all* do, continually. Nevertheless, this interest in the Great Room was new. I went outside to investigate and lo and behold, there above the two central windows were two fist-sized holes about 4 feet apart, 25 feet up. One gray had seen me coming and scabbered off around the corner of the house, clinging to its vertical face like a freakin’ spider-squirrel, doing whatever a spider-squirrel does. I looked back to the holes and there, inside the far one, twitched the nose and jet-black eyes of another. As Bugs had taught me, I intoned under my breath, to no one in particular, “You know, **THIS** means **WAR!**”

Ladder, wood, hammer, nails, trap, screws/washers, screwdriver. All check. I patched the near hole and affixed the trap to the other. Within 25 minutes the squirrel was bagged. In 15 more I



Clockwise from top: Pleasant Mt. hike; Girls' weekend in Amsterdam; Cantering; Hal Sr. successfully battles cancer in '10; Back in the Sunfish groove after 30 years, as of Father's Day.

had disposed of him, patched the second hole and put everything away. Take that, *Sciurus carolinensis*. *Ite in orcum directe*.

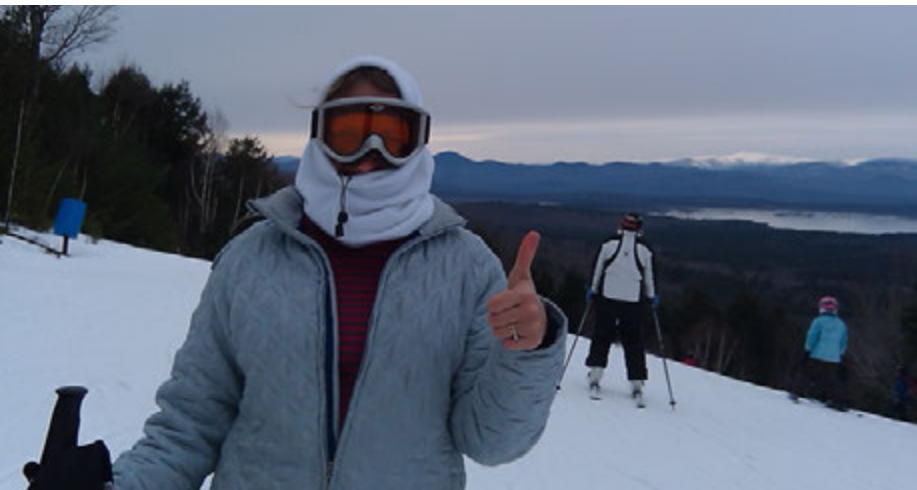
Winter came, and the scrabbling in my barn continued. Finally, I found a weak point in the Tyvek where the central joist met the front wall and sealed it up neatly with pretty heavy-duty chicken wire. The ladder went up, the original wood patch came down and the trap was affixed to the façade. Next day, around 3 p.m., his stay in my barn came to an end, permanently.

About this time, we Vanderlips began to seriously discuss other measures for reducing the squirrel population generally. As it was the Christmas season and we have a 14-year-old boy (great natural fans of fire arms, we've found), it was resolved to get him an air rifle (one step below a .22) so he and his neighbor friend, already a practiced marksman, could start more proactively reducing the surplus squirrel population. Not very pious, even by the looser Dickensian, cultural standard. But we could reward the kids, one pelt at a time, thereby instilling important capitalist principles. So I went to Wal-Mart because, as we know, in America you can just go in and buy pretty much any gun you want, regardless of mental health. A Remington model sold me straightaway by virtue of my meager resources of brand recognition and a picture of a squirrel in the cross hairs right on the box.

The scrabbling had continued in the barn wall after my most recent kill. Indeed, there had been an accomplice, and I got him the week between Xmas and New Year's.

So yeah, everyone's fine here but the squirrels. The kids are super achievers actually; we couldn't be prouder. Or happier. Or healthier. See all the visual evidence sprinkled about herein, and best wishes for 2011.

— Team Vanderlips



Clockwise from top:
Pleasant Pond; disc golf; Silas played more actual golf holes in 2010 than his dad; Halloween; Mountain Mama.