

# Mouse-capades: A Safari Journal

By Laurie Lindsay

Originally published in *Voice of the Hill*, Vol 5, No 7 (October) 2003.

Have you ever read a children's story about mice? Typically, the mice are cute and lovable and are never any trouble to humans. By the time we're adults, we know that there is more to the story. Although house mice are generally smaller than five to eight inches long (including the tail) they successfully intimidate many adults.

As we head into fall, we have an excellent opportunity to become very familiar with house mice. When weather becomes more harsh, the mice seek shelter and our homes offer not only shelter but other things conducive to their well being, for example, food. House mice on my property didn't wait for fall. Much to my distress, they got an early start.

## Friday, August 4, 2003

Two college-age houseguests sit at my breakfast table preparing for a long day of sightseeing. I offer them a new brand of snack bar sent to me as a product sample. Knowing the box is already open, I reach into the cupboard and recoil in horror: **a round hole about two inches in diameter has been nibbled out of the box top.** The seven remaining bars in the box have shredded foil packaging and all the chocolate coating from the "chocolate peanut crunch" bars is gone.

**How disgusting! How embarrassing! Too stunned to scream, the guests sit with their eyes popping out, their jaws resting on their sternums, and their curly hair springing up.**

The other box of bars looks pristine. I must write to the manufacturer to tell them that even mice won't eat those yogurt-covered bars.

## Sunday, August 10, 2003

Reality hits with evidence of peach juices on the kitchen counter. There is one round hole in the top of a ripening peach. The flesh of the peach underneath the skin is gone. My legs start shaking.

## Monday, August 11, 2003

"What should I do about this?" I ask my neighbor Nigel. His advice is, "Use only traditional, old fashioned, wooden mouse traps. Bait them with peanut butter." **Searching the hardware store yields several different traps.** A consultation with the handsome guy at the service desk reveals that he has no expertise with this equipment. We read all the labels. I buy traditional traps and, at bedtime, I load them up, quickly turn off the lights, and race up the stairs to the bedroom. I imagine droves of mice doing a rapid march into the kitchen.

### **Thursday, August 14, 2003**

Each morning fear and loathing rise up as I creep into the kitchen with my heart pounding. After two days of empty traps, today some traps are licked clean. No traps are sprung. Irritated, I call Nigel. "You must not be setting them right," he says. "Of course I am. I followed the directions on the back of the package," I contend. Nigel urges, "Keep trying. You'll catch one before the evening is done!"

To insure success, I purchase more old-fashioned traps and study other traps at the hardware store. Several kinds say things like, "Dead mice start to appear 4-5 days after they eat the bait." Yikes. I don't want any mice staggering off behind the refrigerator and wafting the odors of their demise. Another "quick-kill" trap has a bait box with a small lid. **When the mouse lifts the lid that's it, the party's over.**

Finally, for the more humane, a mouse-size "live-catch" trap lures the pest inside with peanut butter and the door falls down. Absolutely not: I'm not handling anything with a live mouse inside. I decide to test old-fashioned traps against the quick-kill trap with bait box.

### **Friday, August 15, 2003**

No luck. I debate about using live-catch traps. Would I be brave enough to pick them up? Would I kill the mice? How would I kill them? Would they simply expire if I threw trap and all in the trashcan, or would they figure a way out? I consider whether they will climb the stairs to my bedroom.

All the neighbors recommend cats. I don't like cats and discuss the problem with my sister-in-law in Pennsylvania. She says, "Get a cat." While visiting Nigel's house today, he gives me a lesson in trap setting then says, "You'll have one before you go to bed."

With renewed enthusiasm, I set traps at bedtime and run away. Upstairs, while Leno delivers the monologue, **I hear "SNAP!" It takes my breath away.** I'm not going down there to look.

### **Saturday, August 16, 2003**

Inching around the corner into the kitchen, I spot it lying dead by the pantry cupboard, home of snack bars. The mouse is a fat one—so much for the reduced-calorie edition of these new snack bars. Lying on its back in the trap, its legs stick up in the air. There is no postmortem and the sex is not determined. Thanks be to God: I cannot see the head. Wearing surgical gloves, I clean the floor with full-strength bleach.

Elated by the successful safari, I set more traps at night. I turn back the top edges of some grocery bags and lay them down on the floor with the traps pushed all the way to the backs of the bags. Anticipating ease in disposal, I retire eager to see results in the morning.

### **Sunday, August 17, 2003**

No catch. Finishing breakfast, I get up and there's one running into the laundry and another dashing toward the pantry! The traps I bought today have "cheese trays" that look like Swiss cheese. Loading up a cheese tray with peanut butter, I ponder why the tray isn't in the shape of a big peanut.

After lunch, I spot a mouse in one of the bags and it takes off. Another one in the corner dashes under the couch, runs along the sliding glass doors, jumps a stair, runs under a table, dives into the laundry, and hides under the washing machine.

My mother calls. "Mother, did I tell you I'm no longer living alone?" She pauses and then says rather carefully, "No you didn't." We talk about mice habitats.

I now wear surgical gloves to handle anything mice might have touched, wear flip flops at all times in the house, and check the couch cushions every time I sit on the couch. I rest my feet on the coffee table when I sit on the couch and keep my feet off the floor under my computer desk. The counters are completely bare of attractive substances. There isn't even a small bowl with a tea bag and there's not a dirty dish anywhere. **I think I'll never eat peanut butter again.**

### **Monday, August 18, 2003**

No morning catch. I'm allergic to cats but I imagine having a cat. Could I stake it out in the yard? Would that be enough to scare the mice away? Farm cats simply live in barns. Could a cat simply live in my garage? I set the traps at night and put the new ones on layers of newsprint but with easy mice access to the traps. Five baited traps wait in a 13 X 13 foot space.

## **Tuesday, August 19, 2003**

One mouse is ready for a dirt nap. When I go to the swimming pool, I check my locker for mice. Returning home at noon, I find another catch. On patrol with a flashlight, I check all traps. At the last grocery bag trap, a mouse looks out at me. He sits in there. I get up on top of a three-foot stool. I freeze. What should I do? Turn the bag upright and he could crawl up my arm! While dashing from his dining room, this mouse takes a detour through one of my open-toed shoes. Eventually, he runs into the water heater closet. I clean the floor and the shoe with undiluted Mr. Clean. Everything smells like peanut butter.

Nigel visits and tells me to wear my safari hat. Staring at one of the newspaper traps he says, "Oh, that's cute: a placemat!" I tell him the others have their own private dining rooms (i.e., the grocery bags).

**I talk about mice all the time to anyone who will listen.** I set more traps but follow Nigel's directive to use only a dab of peanut butter the size of a new pencil eraser. I've been overfeeding them. Am I attracting them from down the street? Are they too full to eat more and get trapped? Have the feedings enhanced their reflexes for avoiding capture? How long is it before their digestion is done and they are hungry again? Maybe the first mouse died of gluttony. My hands always smell of peanut butter no matter how much I wash them.

## **Wednesday, August 20, 2003**

Two more deaths discovered. Only three surgical gloves left and I refill the traps. Why don't they make those cheese trays scratch and sniff? Couldn't they apply some sort of dried peanut stuff that you just drip water on so it would smell? Then the mice would keep trying to lick it off. I back out of the garage wondering if there are mice in my car and promise to clean out any and all bits of snack debris.

After sharing the safari news with Nigel, we discuss mice nests. I am gathering courage to explore. Local yard snakes aren't doing their job and Nigel thinks they scared the mice into the house.

Returning home, I bang on the door and stamp my feet before entering. Working in my home office I hear a big bumping sound. Is it a trap flying and hitting a wall? I consider checking but decide a mouse's expiration might be somewhat elusive. Later, all traps are empty. I keep imagining noises and by dusk I turn on all the lights. It seems like mice are jumping around on the computer screen.

## **Thursday, August 21, 2003**

Coming down from upstairs I lean out over the railing to see three of the traps down below. Two look occupied. With elation and trepidation, I flip flop loudly to the kitchen. One poor diner was ejected from one of the private dining rooms. To add insult to injury (or should I say casualty?) the trap is on top of him. With my old yellow rubber gloves on, I gingerly turn over the trap. The bar is right across the stomach. Well, that's one way to control excess intake. The whiskers stand at attention. The other diner also met death in a private dining room. Flat on the trap, the head poses with little eyes staring up. The tails are really ugly.

Wrapping them in their private dining rooms, I put them in a large white body bag from CVS. With ceremony I close the bag and carry them to the trash can--no, I mean funeral parlor. **I sing "Taps" like a trumpet then take off the lid to drop them in with their siblings. There are now six in the funeral parlor**

After the funeral I sing to any remaining visiting mice that might be listening: "One way or the other, gonna find you, gonna getcha getcha getcha getcha, One way or the other, gonna find you..."

### **Monday, August 25, 2003**

After no action in the house for several days, I move the traps into the garage. At 10:15 p.m. I hear, "Snap!" followed by sounds of rustling newspaper and scratching. I'm not going out there. I call a friend for support. "Do you think I'm attracting mice from the outside now? Do you think it's a rat out there?" He answers, "It could be one of those in between things--you know, a vole--trying to go hide somewhere."

### **Tuesday, August 26, 2003**

Before breakfast, I peer into the garage from the driveway. There's nothing on the newspaper and no trap in sight. Although I'm still skittish, I clean the kitchen floor again so I can walk barefoot inside.

In the afternoon I see the missing trap. It is upended just next to the track of the garage door and I cannot see the top side of the trap. Stepping closer, I see that the mouse is alive--right there at the opening of a hole. Some part of him is stuck in the trap. Bravely, I try to pull the trap and mouse out of the hole with a pitchfork and shovel. Pulling its foot loose from the trap, the mouse escapes down the hole.

**Now neighbor children express fear of visiting the "mouse-house lady." I confer with my mother again. She says, "In the winter they die between the walls and it's a smelly time of year. If you have guests, just get out the**

**scented candles or make applesauce with cinnamon or something else that's spicy!"**

**Sunday, September 14, 2003**

All the viable traps are out in the garage. There was peanut butter on the trap by the mouse hole but it disappeared without catching the consumer. Every day I see those traps and wonder about the mice.

**Do they still live here? Do they have a whole hotel in the garage? Have they invited friends over? Or-my fondest hope-have they found more elegant accommodations down the street? Did a snake scare them out?**

Last week I may have found their entryway into the house. There's a hole low on the wall in the water heater closet. Tomorrow I simply must stuff that hole with something they cannot chew through. Perhaps a bathtub stopper would work. No, they could push that out. Should I tape a piece of something over these holes and then put spackling on top of that? Will this homemade adventure ever end?

**Don't wait until you see a mouse to learn more about them.** You'll find information at <http://www.ianr.unl.edu/pubs/wildlife/g1105.htm> or just start talking to your neighbors.

*Laurie Lindsay RD, LD, is a contributing writer for The Voice of the Hill. As a registered and licensed dietitian, Laurie helps people aim for good health, no matter what their size, and to enjoy their eating more. She does this through presentations and writing. She also helps organizations make their nutrition communications more successful. See [www.LaurieAomari.com](http://www.LaurieAomari.com) for additional information.*

© Copyright 2003 Laurie Lindsay Aomari