

It was when my houseguests bought the boxes of ant and roach killer and decorated the house with them while I was at work that I got the idea that, perhaps, they thought of my little hippie pad by the sugar cane fields as a vermin-infested shack and were just too polite to say so.

But, see, the vermin/wildlife difference is all in the eye of the beholder.

There are some really wonderful hidden joys to be experienced in coexisting with micro-wildlife. My shower is a serendipitous example of this. Currently there are 5 or 6 cane toads bedding down in the shower floor at night. Perhaps I need to tell you that the shower is outside, and adjacent to a lovely spreading fig tree with a fan of glorious roots that radiate out from the base of the tree in a manner most pleasing to the eye. But anyway, the shower is outside and that means it's open to cohabitation with a myriad of little planetary dwellers who like damp. The toads, for example.

See, the shower "floor" is a bed of aquarium gravel--and some shells, and some coral bits, and the leaves that sometimes blow in when the fig tree goes through a phase of shedding--and I guess it holds the post-shower moisture quite well. By the way, you stand on a big paving slab while showering. It's not like your toes are in the earth. So anyway, the toads are bedding down in nests of damp gravel, keeping their delicate lumpy skin cool and moist overnight, and in the mornings, around sunrise, I hear them shifting around out there and hopping away through the crunchy leaves. They're never there when I arrive, so somehow they always know when I'm coming. I open the door to the enclosure only to find a series of circular, carefully scooped-out beds about 5 inches in diameter. It took me weeks to figure out what was going on.

Then there was the morning I pulled my towel off the hook and wrapped it around my head without looking at it first. As I rubbed my hair I realized I was rolling a little cylindrical soft body up and down over my right ear. I whipped the towel off and watched a limp gecko splat onto the wet paving stone, pause, and dash off. Imagine the morning it had, the mental trauma! The stories to be told down at the gecko watering hole!

A couple of nights ago I lifted my washcloth off the horizontal steel rack to uncover a moth so large, gorgeous and unexpected that I said "beautiful" out loud. Its wings were flattened against the wood of the enclosure wall, a glossy multihued brown of warm life against the greying old wood that stands between me and the outside air (and getting arrested). Huge and fuzzy, this moth had good and serious business in the world and could not afford to be

spotted by birds. I hung the washcloth back over his hiding place most carefully and wished him good luck in his search for a lady moth and in evading the beaks of the night. I still feel a little awed by the visit. He was glorious, mysterious; I wish you could have seen him.

If you shower early in the morning or at sunset the birds are all around you opening or closing their many conversations, and you can pretend you're in a waterfall far from the silly world of people stuff. A waterfall, however, that has hot water options and some fantastic-smelling soaps.

I bet the toads don't much care for the soaps.

The serengeti of the house is less idyllic but no less interesting from a naturalist point of view. The geckos of course wander it at will, welcome to feast on whatever they find and napping the daylight hours away behind the stereo speakers, or the posters of Hawaiian fish I've got hanging everywhere. My truly impressive cane spider, of the handspan size, never did seem to recover from the shock of being flung across the bathroom and seems to have either lit out for safer parts or crawled in a corner and died from shock or wounds sustained or both. I have an unusual smaller cane spider with six legs, clearly a survivor of rougher realms and times, who has been spotted high up on the living room wall. He or she is welcome to roam, catch roaches, and hopefully re-grow those legs in the next series of molts.

With summer comes the confetti of small, iridescent, papery light brown roaches that decorate the screen door at night, or arrange themselves on the wall around lights, and seem to be of very little actual substance. I don't mind them, they hardly seem like roaches, and other than the fact that they've invaded my car I can't find much to disparage about them. They keep the geckos happy, give the cane spider something to do, and will vanish when the winter rains come and the nights get cooler again. They seem to emanate from the sugar cane fields at this time of year, and to the sugar cane fields will they return, I guess, when their season of abundance is over.

I've had one truly HUGE centipede in the house to date, hissing across the woven hala mat on the floor with those determined legs, sounding like a short burst on rain on the tin roof. It's unusual to see them in here because my door has a lip, and they don't like to go up if they can go around, but somehow this weighty specimen got in and, presumably, out again. I haven't seen it since I got the flashlight and tupperware and tried to reason it out from under the couch so that I could assist its return to less civilized realms. But, no matter. I watch where I step, sleep with one ear open, send good thoughts about the

location of the exits, and hope my karma is worth something at times like this.

Who knows? Maybe I've got a moth ambassador advocating on my behalf in the realm of invertebrate matters, or some assistance from the toads (which eat centipedes, miraculously). I don't think, however, that any cane spiders I've flung across the bathroom (it was an accident!) or any bruised and disoriented geckos have anything nice to say about me just now.