

Some people look at houses for beauty. I'm looking for where an animal can get into it.

He goes where the wild things are



■ Straight-laced night cop spends days chasing off homewrecking wildlife

By TOBY COLEMAN
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When the warm weather hits, Sgt. Noel Braley of the Kanawha County Sheriff's Department becomes Batman.

The night-shift cop gets up early each morning, pulls on his khaki uniform and drives off in his green Ford F-150 to do battle with homewrecking raccoons, birds and bats for a few hours.

"Some people look at houses for beauty," he said. "I'm looking for where an animal can get into it."



As Braley and the state's 25 other wildlife removal specialists know, animals will make their way into houses any way they can.

On the hunt

■ "You kind of have to be a detective to know what's going on. You have to understand the behavior of animals to help solve these people's problems."

Noel Braley
Wildlife Removal Service Inc.

Birds will fly through uncovered vents and chimneys. Rodents will crawl up pipes. And bats will squeeze through gaps no bigger than a matchbook.

"Animals do weird things," Braley said. "They're really difficult to solve sometimes."

Braley finds a way, for a fee. He traps the animals, cleans up their waste and closes the gaps they used to crawl inside the structure in the first place.

For Braley, a 36-year-old college graduate, his Wildlife Removal Service Inc. remains a supplement to his night job as an evening shift commander for the Kanawha County Sheriff's department. He says the service, which he runs out of his house with his wife's help, is profitable.

He got into the wildlife eviction business six years ago, soon after the state Division of Natural Resources began licensing people to do it.

Braley, who says he finds peace in the woods, has found that wildlife removal requires many of the same skills as two of his favorite pastimes, hunting and fishing. All three require him to get into his prey's head and figure out what they are doing and how they are doing it.

"You kind of have to be a detective to know what's going on," he said. "You have to understand the behavior of animals to help solve these people's problems."

Braley has helped people get rid of all kinds of unwanted houseguests from the animal kingdom. He's cleaned out a snake-infested attic. He's trapped a rooster who took up residence in a tree on Charleston's West Side. He's even helped a woman find the dead possum whose stinky rot drove her from her home.

■ Turn to WILD/2D



Braley pulls out one of the six ladders he carries around on his truck. He comes to jobs prepared to crawl on roofs.



Wild: Man has found everything from roosters to dead possums

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His specialty, though, is bats. He bills himself as the "batman," a nickname that customers and his co-workers use with gusto. When he arrives at a job with one of his part-time assistants "it's Batman and Robin," he said. "That's what everybody says when we show up."

In this version, though, Batman is a clean-cut policeman from Kenna who estimates he's cleaned up dozens of tons of disease-laden bat guano and trapped thousands of bats.

To do his job, he brings metal bat traps he bolts to roofs, a spelunker's helmet, a safety harness, face masks and six different ladders.

They are the tools of the trade for a man who spends his days poking around roofs and dim attics.

On a recent round of bat inspections, Braley put on a head lamp and climbed into the attic of a South Charleston apartment house.

He approached a clump of big brown bats hanging from the roof with a pair of snake tongs and pulled down a bat the size of a deck of cards.

"They're needed for the



CRAIG CUNNINGHAM/DAILY MAIL
To clear bats from an attic, Braley relies on a special metal trap that he bolts over the tiny holes bats use as entrances and exits. Braley began removing animals from homes after the state started licensing eviction specialists six years ago.

CRAIG CUNNINGHAM/DAILY MAIL
Noel Braley, a night-shift officer for the Kanawha County Sheriff's Department, has a second occupation as a wildlife removal specialist. His specialty is removing bats like the one in his hand.



bat. es, our naz- s is ody will go," Braley said. "I just enjoy it, and I've heard if you enjoy something, it's really not work." Contact writer Toby Coleman at tobycoleman@dailymail.com or 348-4886.