

Wandering Wildlife Make Unwanted Guests

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Photo Paul Linden

You know that Alanis Morissette song, “Uninvited”? I know she was talking about a ghost when she sang, “You’re not allowed, you’re uninvited,” but I’m talking about wildlife.

Don’t get me wrong, agreeing to adopt a puppy mid-move to a new house must prove I love animals, I just like to see them hanging out where they belong. And while our dog is welcome inside, the bear making its

way across our neighbors’ granite countertops last weekend, was out of bounds. Nobody invited him in.

Nor did they ask him to help himself to the Quaker chewy bars before scoffing the plastic container of Cheerios. And let’s not forget about the low-fat muffin mix he managed to mess up.

Mr. Bear (it could have been Mrs. but given its brazen bust-in and shameless consumption of carbs, I doubt it) did have the decency to devour while no one was around.

Our neighbors, vacationing in Alberta at the time of the home invasion, were ultimately grateful to find granola bar wrappers scattered about their slate as opposed to bear claw graffiti scratched into their new cabinetry.

Sure, the bear busted the window screen to get in, neglecting to wipe his paws before padding about, but it could have been worse. Paw prints can be cleaned and at least he gently opened the cupboards before stealing the contents. And thankfully no one was home, possibly downstairs watching CNN while local wildlife was upstairs, making breakfast.

Nonetheless, to a gal who has been living in the barren desert of the Middle East for the past 5 years, where the scariest thing you might see is a small Scorpion scuttling beneath the sand because it is far more terrified of the tent your trying to erect in its stomping ground than you are of its possible sting, spotting a bear’s butt in your neighbors’ kitchen window is a little unnerving.

Not that we didn't have some curious camels to contend with while living in Abu Dhabi.

On one camping trip, a group of us were settling around the fire when along came, not a spider, but a Bedouin on a camel, who sat down beside her.

Yes, out of the darkness there emerged a cloaked figure, hazy in the campfire smoke, elegantly poised atop one of the tallest animals known to womankind. The bearded Bedouin dismounted his beast and proceeded to plunk himself down in a lawn chair—empty only because its former occupant was bent over the adjacent cooler, helping himself to a cold one—where he sat, silently staring into the fire.

Knowing it customary to offer visitors a drink, the Canadian campers quietly covered their beer cans while questioning if their “guest” would care for a refreshment of the non-alcoholic kind. Our friend didn't speak a word of English, but he shook his head, “la”, he didn't want anything. Even a paper plate of barbecued steak waved his way failed to entice him.

After an appropriately uncomfortable time, he stood up and motioned to us, in a charade-like manner, that his beast of burden was available for riding. Ten dirham (four dollars) later, the kids stunk like camel but were happy and our guest departed, back into the mist from which he came.

I thought I'd seen the end of that camel but he must have summoned his friends because around 2 a.m. I awoke to a thundering sound outside our tent door.

They've come to get us, I thought. The Bedouin told his family about the Canadian squatters camping on his land, and now they've come to kidnap us all.

Peering tentatively outside, I watched in awe as the moonlight streamed across the silvery sand, highlighting a half dozen camels gracefully galloping, weaving their way between our tents like horses dancing up the dust between barrels.

They pranced about, checking out our digs, the glowing remains of the campfire, the icy contents of the coolers. It was as though they were making sure the new inhabitants were welcome.

I may have been shocked to find them galloping outside my door but they were probably just as surprised to find us gallivanting upon their turf, camping upon their court...uninvited.



Photo Patrick Kilorn