

## 'OUT ON A LIMB' - IPM

A few years ago, my wife and I were visiting Longwood Gardens in Pennsylvania and along the trail we saw a sign that said 'Don't feed the Cat, part of our IPM program'. IPM is a garden acronym for Integrated Pest Management which is an environmentally sensitive approach to control by limiting the use of pesticides. Not all pests need control as many are innocuous, some even being beneficial. With IPM, less risky controls are tried first such as disrupting the mating cycle removing the food source or trapping. I must admit, I never thought of a cat as being a pest management agent. I quickly scrolled through my mind as to what pests do they manage? Well, there are all kinds; rats, mice, voles, moles, frogs, lizards, skinks, chameleons, snakes and believe it or not squirrels.

I have seen moles completely wreck a lawn as they tunnel foraging for grubs and earthworms. One thought is if you eliminate the food source the moles will go elsewhere (YOUR NEIGHBOR'S YARD). The problem with eradication of the food source is earthworms are beneficial.

Voles on the other hand are vegetarians. They tunnel under plants eating the roots and all of a sudden you notice a plant is dead for no apparent reason. They can consume bulbs, seed and can damage small trees or even larger trees if they tunnel around the root collar. They do damage to grass eating the root system and tunneling through the yard. Many people see vole tunneling and blame it on moles. Both are very destructive.

We have a black one eyed cat named 'Sylvester' and he has Betty and I trained as his staff. He is the most spoiled feline you have ever seen but oh, what a hunter. He likes to share his triumphs' by bringing them inside for our approval. Once he caught a full grown squirrel that was so big he couldn't get him in the cat door. I can't remember the last time I saw a squirrel in our yard or another cat for that matter.

One day we came to find this black and white spotted cat meowing at our garage door and we tried to make him go away for two or three days but as you have already guessed, he won out. I thought that Sylvester was a hunter but he has nothing on Spot. He finds vermin we didn't even know we had in our yard.

I'm sorry to say occasionally they bring in a bird which breaks our hearts. We try to talk to them about that but they don't seem to understand. Sylvester and Spot are so good at what they do, I thought about renting them out but I think they would just come right back home to their servants. You see, we don't own them, they own us.

I tell my clients, 'If you have a problem with voles, moles, snakes or maybe squirrels, get a cat'. I will be the first to admit however, not all cats are hunters. At one time we had another cat named Bo and he could care less about any of those critters.

Our garden is pretty much free of varmints and when Sylvester, Spot and I stroll through the yard I can almost hear the words coming from the hither lands, 'I TWAT I TAW A PUDDY TAT'.

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