

## Battle Of Buys Is Sideline Of Ranch Batching

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MERTZON — Ever since my family moved to town to be closer to school, the kitchen varmint problem here at the ranch house has been severe enough to test the rangers of the Everglades National Park in Florida. Roaches and silverfish have taken up permanent residence. Hard shelled water bugs have seized complete control of the damp places. Sugar ants have raised several generations within the general area. If a cricket were to try perch upon my hearth, he wouldn't have time for one full chirp before some kind of bug pounced upon him.

It's a shameful state of affairs. If the insects would only use a little judgment, the house would be large enough for all of us. We could live in harmony if these pests exported by the cities would stop roosting on the food canisters and cease trying to over-run the vegetable department of the refrigerator. But not one in the lot limits his activities to the normal bug ranges.

The worst thing is the way they have to show off when company comes. Just as sure as Noah was the smartest ark builder who ever lived, a covey of roaches or a school of silverfish will interrupt a visit by making a few laps in front of the guests. The whole pack seems to be driven by an exhibitionist urge that would make a publicity-hungry Hollywood star appear as timid as a milkmaid.

Of all the species represented, the roach kingdom is showing the most steady increase. Close to 600 families of them now live the year around in the kitchen area. After a careful census of the tracks and spoor along the baseboards, I'd estimate that another 600 head range in and out during the high points of their life cycle.

For example, during the mating season, which lasts 360 days of the year, spot checks on the antennae count generally run about 1000 braces of feelers per day.

Actually, the number of roaches isn't the real problem; nor do I particularly resent their antics when someone drops by. The main difficulty is maintaining the grudge which mankind has traditionally held against roaches. After six years of watching these uninhibited little scavengers sunbathing on the window sills and playing snatch the bread crumb on the drainboard, it's hard to keep disliking them. After all, when you compare the lowly roach to all the other bugs and parasites that feast upon man and his material goods, he's more friend than foe.

As long as my health holds, I plan to continue to give battle; unless a worldwide shortage of guaranteed roach killing powders and fool proof decoys develops, the delicate balance between bug and householder should at least be held to a stalemate.

Nevertheless, although I'm a bit weary of this fight, I'd be the last to say that of all the problems that beset ranchdom, the roach or any of his relatives is even a front runner.