

OCTOBER 1, 1987

Toward the end of August the broomweeds got so thick and tall in the country that all the brown crickets around the area were driven into the town site of Mertzon. Brown crickets, in case you don't know, are highly allergic to broomweed pollen. Unlike humans, a cricket doesn't linger to sneeze and snort and break out into hives when his system is offended. He just hooks it up and moves away from his troubles.

Well, by the time they'd hopped and crawled through those high stands of weeds, they were looking for a home to spend the winter. In a week, the streets were slippery with mashed crickets and the general disposition of the housekeepers was getting hot enough to set off the fire detectors in local homes.

At about what must have been the peak of the invasion, I passed through town early one morning just in time to see the auburn-haired lady who runs a gift shop across from the bank evicting the crickets from her premises with a big broom. Her strokes were reaching such a fury that on the upswing she was moving enough insects to slow down the traffic in front of her store. From the way she was pivoting and making back swings, had she ever made an empty swath she'd have pitched off her front porch.

Over at the grocery store, I overheard a clerk and a customer wishing the seagulls would move inland and eat all their crickets. The few times that I've had to study seagulls at close hand, unless I had a firm order for some fertilizer at a fancy price, I'd take crickets until they were waist deep and then start praying for the seagulls to come.

One cricket singing on a fireplace hearth is supposed to bring good fortune. Two things, however, have to be true before a cricket is recognized as a good omen: you have to be having mighty rotten luck to catch the improvement, and you want to be sure the song that cricket is chirping isn't a gang call instead of his good luck tune.

It's probably safer to use rabbit foot charms. Crickets belong to the same family as cockroaches, so I'll let you take it from there whether you'd like to invite one in to sit on your fireplace hearth.