Knock, knock - it's my friendly neighbourhood internet burglar

I wonder if you realise just how many people are knocking at the door of your broadband PC (or sneaking round the back and breaking and entering). We often talk about the scale of security problems and internet threats and quote this 'research' or that 'study' but I thought I would try to quantify this myself by setting up an experiment to watch this for a 24 day period in August which you would normally think as a holiday period, but hackers never rest. This is what I found by analysing the logs of a single trip-wired sniffing machine.

During the 24 days, there was a staggering total of 18533 unwanted visitors. That's a total of 772 a day, 32 an hour or one every 2 minutes on average, day and night. Of these, 282 tried to break in explicitly. That's 12 a day or once every 2 hours on average. There were 52 attempts to take over the machine and use it as a surrogate spam relay. That's 2 a day approximately. There were no less than 11211 port scans on the machine looking for vulnerabilities. That's a staggering 467 a day or one every 3 minutes.

I'd like you to imagine this cast into your domestic environment. You are sitting there in your front room with your Wallace and Gromet slippers on (well I do anyway) watching your television set-top box crash repeatedly. When it doesn't crash, you are treated to a viewing experience which has you dreaming wistfully of a gun and a single bullet. Meanwhile, every 2 minutes, somebody is wandering past your house eyeing it curiously. 2 out of every 3 of these climb over your wall and wander round your front and back garden trying windows and doors explicitly looking for a way in. 1 in 40 of those who climb over your wall bring a sledgehammer with them and start bashing on the back door. During the time your television set-top box grudgingly allows you to watch a film all the way through, one person on average will have tried to break your back-door down.

Of the people who bring sledgehammers, one of them had no less than 8 separate attempts on the same day and was too stupid to cover it up (61.208.228.250, host61228-250.tvm.ne.jp, a Japanese site), one had 6 attempts, 4 had 5 attempts and no less than 36 of them had 4 separate attempts. Another 6 had 3 separate attempts, 39 had 2 attempts and 8 broke their sledgehammers on the first attempt. In other words, most of these attempts are the same people just bashing away. The spam hijackers are even more persistent. Of 52 attempts, 40 were perpetrated by 8 sites having 5 goes each. All putative mail hijackers were multiple offenders. Of the ones just wandering round the garden trying the locks, one site did this no less than 1570 times or about every 20 minutes and another one was almost as bad with 1444 attempts.

As far as I can tell, none of these succeeded but you can never be sure. There is big money to be made through digital insecurity and attacks will become much more sophisticated and numerous. Unless we collectively get a hold on this quickly, we will lose this particular arms race.