

## **Packrats and Kissing Bugs**

Bushy-tailed or White-throated Woodrats are often referred to by the common name of “packrat” due to their habit of collecting things such as twigs, cholla pieces, shiny bits of anything or, one of their favorites, dried dog stools. Their collections are used to pad their nests, called “middens,” and such nests should be your first warning sign that you have a very unwelcome neighbor moving onto your property. Packrats, in a natural surrounding, will construct their middens in rock piles, brush piles, and downed cholla; in other words, just about anywhere that offers a little protection. Unfortunately, when they move into our home spaces, they choose barbecue grills, pool equipment, or worse yet, your \$100,000 RV parked out front. Packrats are known to fill engine compartments with all of their normal junk, as well as disabling vehicles by chewing several key pieces of wiring. And, yes, there will be warning signs under the vehicle but often, by the time we catch on to who our unwanted guest is, the damage is already done.

As for prevention, I do not recommend poison. If it does work, poison is one of those things that just seems to flow through the food chain, going from prey to predator to scavenger, with negative results all along the way. Sticky traps are cruel and non-selective. You might catch and starve a songbird or lizard, as easily as a rat. The large rat traps, baited with a small amount of peanut butter, can be placed in or close to the site of rat activity, sometimes for a lethal and rapid result. If you miss him, though, it is unlikely he will fall for the same trick twice. If you are of the notion to try a small catch-em-alive trap, this will enable you to humanely relocate the hapless rodent to some other part of the world.

Yet another reason to rid yourself of packrats and their nests is their association with Kissing Bugs. This critter feeds on the blood of nesting vertebrates, including packrats and humans. Given the name based on their tendency to prefer soft, exposed areas of the human face such as lips or ears, they are also known as “Cone-nosed Bug.” In humans, the saliva of a Cone-nose bite can cause symptoms ranging from mild itching to severe joint pain, nausea, chills, and dizziness to anaphylactic shock. Cone-nosed Bugs are nocturnal, attracted by light, and are brought indoors often by loitering around a porch light. Once inside, don’t be surprised to find them hanging around on the walls in your bedroom.

Thus an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Stay vigilant when noticing nesting signs of a packrat; piles of sticks, pieces of cactus, and who-knows-what-all else. By removing or disturbing the rats source of protection, not only is it possible to encourage his departure, but hopefully he’ll take his band of Kissing Bugs with him.