

Pack Rats: Our Sandia Heights Residents



Pack Rats share our property and arroyos, which may not be beneficial to us. Below is some more information about your mammalian neighbors:

Properly called the White-throated Wood Rat, these animals are common in New Mexico, and are nocturnal in nature. They are up to fifteen inches long and weigh up to ½ pound. Their coloration is a dark gray-brown on top with a lighter underbelly. Adult pack rats are solitary: only one adult per nest. They are active diggers and skilled climbers. Their primary foods are cactus, but they will eat almost anything and do not need a water source.

Females give birth to two to three young every six to eight weeks with a life expectancy of two years.

Since they must have shelter, nests are built in any protected area including: cacti, bushes, trees, rock crevices, pool heaters, spas, car engines, ceiling voids, gas grills, under sheds, and wood piles. They will fortify the nest with additional material including cactus, rocks, sticks, dog droppings and just about anything else they can find; the presence of additional fortification material is the telltale sign that distinguishes a pack rat nest from that of a squirrel or other rodent.

The problems created by pack rats are that the nests harbor blood sucking kissing bugs (conenose bugs), fleas, lice, brown spiders, scorpions, and mice. The nests attract snakes, skunks, foxes, coyotes and bobcats. The nests damage and destroy landscaping. Nesting areas include cars, pool equipment and even get in to the ceiling voids of homes. They enjoy chewing on and through wires in cars, attics, spas and pool heaters, causing fecal and urine material to accumulate.

Lastly, nests are vectors for disease including:

- Allergic reactions from kissing bugs
- Hantavirus from mice
- Plague from fleas
- Infections from Brown Spider bites.

The Solution:

Pack rat issues can be solved by creating and maintaining a pack rat-free area around your home, and by eliminating nests and opportunities to build nests on your property. This means analysis of vehicles parked outside, vegetation types, and terrain: Is it flat, hilly, rocky, or sandy?

The key to eliminating and preventing pack rats is addressing their use and need for shelter. Eliminating nests as well as potential nesting sites is critical.



- You cannot control the food supply - the desert provides all they need
- You cannot control how many rats are on adjacent properties
- You **can** only control nest and nesting opportunities on your property!

1. Inspection

Locate existing nests and potential nesting sites in the area.

2. Live Traps

Catching and removing the rat is essential before taking out a nest, or it will seek shelter and build a new nest elsewhere. Capture traps are readily available on the web and at local pet supply stores. Have-a-Heart is a popular brand and, depending on size, usually sells for under \$20. Suggested bait is a wet spoonful of peanut butter and oatmeal mix. Once captured, the rats can be released in several open areas directly on the east side of the Sandias. They are harmless to handle in the trap. Do not do this in the winter months, as the pack rats will become trapped overnight and eventually freeze to death before the morning sun warms the air.

There are some, very few, critter control companies that advertise they trap and release in another area. Check them out very carefully as it is too easy just to kill the critters. Most of these companies will not bother to relocate the rats.



3. Nest treatment

Once the resident pack rat is removed, parasites and other pests may be living in the nest. These pests can move outwards if the nest is not promptly treated.

4. Remove the Nest

Within 24 hours of removing the resident rat, the nest needs to be completely destroyed before another rat moves in. Here is a list of items needed: Safety glasses, dust mask, heavy gloves (Do not touch any nest item.), long-handled flat-bladed shovel and garden rake (to pull the nest apart), loppers (to cut up debris in order to box it), and large cardboard boxes. All debris should be removed. Any hidden underground chambers need to be located and filled in. Boxes can then be brought to the land-fill or Convenience Center.

5. Environmental Change at the Nest Site

Rats like to go where rats have been, and even after catching the resident rat and removing the nest, other rats may try to rebuild in the same area. Thinning, trimming, and possibly bringing in additional soil needs to be performed in the immediate area to prevent new nesting. In some cases (rat-proofing—especially in car engines, grills) is needed to keep rats out.

6. Prevention

Pack rats need a sheltered area to feel secure enough to start a new nest. Deny them protection and they will move on.