

## MORE ABOUT PACK RATS

We live in a desert environment and as we build our houses, the desert critters usually get rudely moved to another location. Such is the case with the snakes, birds and large mammals. But the animals that live below the surface of the ground or in a protected surface area, such as at the base of a cactus or tree, is another matter. Sometimes they move while the home is being built, but then move back in when the construction is finished. Such is the case of the Pack Rat.

A pack rat's home, called a midden, is a debris pile constructed of materials collected by the pack rat that they find in the surrounding areas. A midden may preserve the materials incorporated into it for up to 50,000 years, thus may be analyzed to reconstruct their original environment, and comparisons between middens allow a record of vegetative and climate change to be established. Examination and comparisons of pack rat middens have largely supplanted pollen records as a method of study in the regions where they are available.

In the absence of rock crevices or caves, the dens are often built under trees or bushes. Of course, if the pack rat can find a place of shelter inside our home, their nests are better protected from the elements and natural enemies. We routinely find pack rat nests in natural gas pool/spa heaters. They love the warmth of the pilot and the shelter provided by the metal heater. They will chew the heater electrical wiring and can damage the heater if it ignites the nest. Pack rats also love attic spaces or rafter spaces for nesting. Imagine how comfortable the nest is when lined with fiberglass insulation. The vinyl jacket on the electrical wiring is like dessert to the rodents and they will damage electrical wiring whenever they can.