

IS IT A GROUND SQUIRREL OR A PACK RAT?



Our Ground Squirrels:



Round-tailed ground squirrels are social animals, living in small colonies. They hibernate through the winter months, emerging in early February to take advantage of the new spring growth to regain the weight they lost over the winter. They average 6 to 7 young, born in the middle of March or April. By May, the youngsters accompany the mother to the surface. Mother squirrels emerge first in the morning, checking the area for predators, and then call the youngsters out. The young come spilling out for several hours of wrestling, playing, and feeding, then the whole family retires to the burrow until late in the afternoon when temperatures again start to cool. They often stand on their hind legs trying to get a better view as they watch for their many predators.

All of Arizona's ground squirrel and chipmunk species are classified as non-game animals by the Arizona Game and Fish Department and are protected under ARS Title 17-309. However, may be controlled by any legal means if they are causing damage as per ARS Title 17-239. If live trapped ground squirrels or chipmunks are to be relocated, the Arizona Game and Fish Department must be contacted for an appropriate release site before the animal is transported.

When ground squirrels are present in large numbers they can cause structural damage by burrowing under patios, stairs, retention walls, or foundations. They may also invade garages, walls and attics. They will consume flower bulbs, seeds, or seedlings as well as bird seed, grass seed, and pet food that is not stored in rodent-proof storage containers.

Our Packrats:



Woodrats, commonly known as packrats, are famous for their houses made of sticks, cactus parts, animal dung and debris, usually tucked in around a prickly pear cactus, under a mesquite tree or hackberry bush, or among boulders. The house acts as insulation for the nest, which is underneath but close to the ground surface. The spiny cactus parts may also offer some protection from coyotes digging up the nest. Woodrats can become quite a nuisance, getting into everything from attics to car engines, stealing their treasures, damaging electrical wiring and wreaking general, noisy havoc.

Several entrance holes allow the packrat a quick escape should a snake come visiting. Packrats are solitary, with only one rodent per household, unless a female has young. Some desert female Woodrats have been known to deliver up to 5 litters per year with as many as 5 young per litter.

Primarily nocturnal and vegetarian, desert Woodrats survive on a diet of spiny cactus, mesquite beans, bark, berries, pinyon nuts, seeds (including bird seed) and any available green vegetation. They rely on succulent plants for their water, since they do not have refined metabolic and water conservation capabilities. They are one of the few animals that can navigate with impunity between cactus spines to feed on the juicy pads.

Woodrats forage at night, eating food and carrying some items back to the house to store for later use (as is the case with mesquite beans), or to incorporate them (especially cactus parts) right into the house structure.

The critter at the top of the article is a ground squirrel.