

Pack Rat Midden in My Yard

Even though desert pack rats are really cute, they are a terrible nuisance. They make huge, messy "middens" and live in them with such vermin as conenose kissing bugs which find their way into homes and bite unsuspecting and cleverly anaesthetized victims (me). The conenoses can actually anaesthetize their victim so that you don't feel a thing...at first. The bites are horrendously itchy and swollen, and some people get quite sick from them.

An ever-so-cute desert pack rat had created a midden right in my front yard, not far from my front door. Rats attract snakes some of which are rattlesnakes, something else I prefer to not have in my yard and had far too many of last summer. So the rat midden in the front yard had to go!! Rats are not only cute, they are pretty smart. The rat that originally built the nest selected the brushiest part of the yard that is adorned with a sotol. Sotols are much like agaves in that they have straps for leaves and become massive as they age. The individual straps have curved razor blades the entire length of the leaf on both sides of the leaf. The weaponry is just wicked, so the rat was well protected.

I began digging the midden out a few days ago and thought I had pulled most of it apart. I got back to it today and had to get nippers to cut out much of the back side of the sotol just to access what appeared to, sadly, be even more rat nest. There is a jojoba bush, some big aloes, a very tangled chuparosa bush and the sotol, all under a big pine tree. So I had to crouch low to even get in there. It was very awkward.

Naturally, as I trimmed and sweated in cramped discomfort, not able to move very well, my thoughts turned to the fact that rattlesnakes often hole up in rat nests. As I trimmed and pulled junk out, it became obvious that the rat had used a backhoe and



had dug a hole under the sotol and then backfilled, and the whole mess of nest was huge! It was plenty big enough for a few rattlesnakes.

I kept pulling stuff out until, suddenly, a face appeared at the entrance of the hole, a reptilian face with a darting tongue!!! I yelled pretty loud and scrambled backward as best I could. Nature nut that I am though, I quickly recognized the sweet face of a gopher snake, not a rattler!!! Boy was I happy to see the gopher snake!!! It lurked there, assessing with its tongue for awhile while looking at me, then vanished back inside the rat nest. I quickly packed up all my junk and left it alone! With any luck, the snake will do my work for me! Or maybe it already has and was just napping after a good meal.