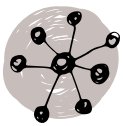


LITTLE WYOMING

# MEET THE BUSHY-TAILED WOODRAT

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A-BARN

Cows, goats, horses and sheep are all animals we associate with barns. But what happens when those animals move out, and barns are abandoned? Wildlife moves in! Abandoned barns make great homes for a variety of wild animals like owls, snakes and rodents, because they provide protection from weather and predators. They also provide wildlife with food and nesting materials. One especially interesting animal that might take advantage of an abandoned barn is the bushy-tailed woodrat (*Neotoma cinerea*).



## WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Bushy-tailed woodrats get their name from their long, bushy tail, which they can wrap around themselves to keep warm. However, that's not their only name! They are also often called packrats or trade rats. They get these nicknames because they collect things, including plants, animal bones and human items – hence the nickname packrat. If they see something they want to collect, they'll drop whatever they were already carrying to grab the new thing instead – hence, trade rat. They especially seem to be attracted to shiny things!



## PROBLEM-SOLVING ARCHITECTS

Packrats are problem solvers because they find ways to make use of abandoned things they find in their environment, including the barn itself. They also build a food storage structure called a midden inside their dens. The middens are made from the many different things they collect! Once the midden has been built, the packrat urinates on it. The urine crystallizes, encasing the midden in a solid material similar to fossils preserved in amber.



## HISTORY KEEPERS

Because of the way they are built, fossils and ancient artifacts have been found in packrat middens! And because of a packrat's tendency to use human artifacts, archaeologists look through packrat middens for clues about ancient human civilizations. Packrat middens have been found dating to over 40,000 years ago!

These nocturnal, short-lived rodents can actually be great stewards of human history. What barn items might future archaeologists find in packrat middens that tell them about life in your area?