
Snakes and Spiders Won't Do It Alone

by: Jim Blackburn

WHY I LIKE SNAKES AND SPIDERS

I've been living under a delusion. I believed if there were snakes in my yard, pack rats would be eliminated, and if there were spiders with webs in my house, insects would be eliminated.

I've been told that most snakes and spiders are carnivorous; therefore, snakes eat pack rats and spiders eat insects. True enough!

Pack rats¹ and many insects are vegetarians. And there seem to be ample seeds and vegetation around and inside my house to attract them. Remember this: wherever food is available, expect rodents and various insects to move!



My mistaken assumption was thinking that with the snakes eating the pack rats and the spiders eating the insects this would eliminate the pack rat and insect problems. Wrong!

My dilemma is insects crawling into my books, wool rugs, etc. Eaten and lost to moths was a beautiful natural-dye, 6x8 foot Indian rug. Also succumbing to I don't know which little hungry creatures was a bearskin rug made up at my wife's request from a bear I shot a number of years ago. We raised our daughters on that rug!

¹ White-throated Woodrat; *Neotoma albugula*



My wife asked why there are fewer cobwebs this year both inside the house and outside around the windows and doors. I didn't have an explanation, but it did start me thinking about spiders and the cobwebs they spin.

I've learned spiders² are one of the best predators of insects. So it stands to reason if there are cobwebs in the house, then there are also insects! Just think! Insects are not going to set up housekeeping in your home if there isn't ample food for their table. Spiders can kill several times their weight daily in household insect pests and flies. If the spider's webs are destroyed and the discouraged spider moves out, then what are the insects they feed on going to do?

Yes, cobwebs draped in corners of a house are commonly viewed as a sign of poor housekeeping. But insects upon which spiders feed must be there too. These insects are usually hidden in blankets, storage areas, structural cracks, boots, etc. These insects are generally very active behind the scenes. We should think when cobwebs are present that there is also something else present that is probably more damaging and in need of our attention.

Usually my response in seeing a spider has been to stomp on it, but I'm rethinking that. When my wife finds a spider, trapped in the tub for example, she usually scoops the fellow up with a piece of paper and carefully releases it outside. Now I'm beginning to view spiders and cobwebs as my allies against destructive insects. Rather than deploring the cobwebs I'm beginning to think further to discover what might be in the house that is attractive to the spider's appetite. I usually don't see the spiders around the house, but there was one large fellow of about two inches often seen in the morning in the shower. It was kind of white with what looked like brown boots on its feet. Sometimes it is on the wall, but usually it's in the shower. I haven't seen it lately so I hope it's off busily doing its predatory job elsewhere.

Now another problem is the pack rats. They have nibbled and destroyed the wiring in my cars parked outside. This has happened over six times. When my service station diagnoses my vehicle's problem I'm asked if I live in Cave Creek! It seems chewed wire is common here.

² Editor's Reference Note: [How to Identify Arizona Spiders](#)



My current analysis is that the pack rats are very prolific, but snakes may eat only one rat each week. However, if they ate all the rats, wouldn't they just move along to where their food supply was more abundant? It's the same with spiders – they wouldn't stick around once the insects had been cleared out. Sure, it would be great if the snakes eliminated all the pack rats and the spiders eliminated all the insects. However, if the food source isn't eliminated or discouraged, the cycle begins all over again.

So-o-o – now I spray a pre-emergent around the perimeter of the house out to about 30 feet. Less vegetation and seeds near the house means less food for critters. Less fire hazard too. I like to think in terms of a desert/desert barrier around my desert home: no vegetable and seed foods to entice or encourage pack rats. But of course in the house where our woolen clothes, beloved books and my wife's herbs, flour and other essentials are kept we have to strategize to keep the insects from invading. We also allow a few spiders around to help.

Now I really do know snakes and spiders won't completely eliminate pack rat and insect problems, but I still like having them around as a welcome backup line of defense.

