

# Critters creating nuisance in Tahoe



Critters are leaving holes in Tahoe yards.

**By Susan Wood**

Could the rodents of Tahoe be telling us something about an abnormal winter coming up?

That's the question some Lake Tahoe residents have posed in dealing with digging, chomping and rampaging squirrels, chipmunks and mice foraging pine cones and digging into homes and yards. The answer may depend on who you talk to.

"It's just the time of year when they do this," said Nevada Division of Wildlife staff biologist Larry Neel, who coincidentally had answered a call earlier that day about an ambitious wood rat. "They're just feeling the time of year like we are."

He listed the barometric pressure, temperature variances and length of sunlight in the day as symbols of changes in the season the animals pay attention to.

"They're reacting to age-old signals that they need to be caching food," Neel said. "We would expect them to react this

way.”

But tell that to at least one Round Hill gardener who has resorted to wearing a bicycle helmet for her hobby because the squirrels are dropping so many heavy pine cones it could be downright dangerous without the head protection.

Scott Conner, a nuisance wildlife trapping specialist working for Cat’s Eye pest control, knows the rodent behavior this time of year is routine. However, he’s noticed a certain aggressiveness and tenacity from the animals that appear to be out of the ordinary.

“What we’re finding out around Tahoe is the squirrels are really determined,” he said. “If we kick them out, they dig up the entry point we’ve sealed if there’s substandard construction. They’ll even rip off screens put up to keep them out.”

Conner, who has taken a rash of mice infiltration calls lately, shared that normal behavior prompts the animals to move to another location when shown they’re unwanted. Not this year.

“It’s as if they’re saying: ‘This is my house’,” he said.

Bats have sounded alarm bells among wildlife specialists because they should have long migrated. Conner is still seeing the mammals stick around in homes, despite the absence of food like mosquitoes that disappeared months ago.

And raccoons have kept their reputations for creating mischief. Conner recalled a friend’s encounter with a destructive one-eyed raccoon that was trapped and released miles away. The bandit ended up returning to the same house with his pirate eye.

Humans may not understand what animal activity, but the weather forecasters say the temps will be in the 60s and windy

this weekend, with a 40 percent chance of showers on Tuesday and Wednesday.

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