



Several species of gerbils, mice, rats and shrews visit flower heads of some **Protea species** and Hook Pincushions. Rodents are attracted by a strong musty odour, and a reward of syrupy sugar which is secreted in large quantities. In order to prevent birds and insects from stealing this nectar, rodent-pollinated proteas have inconspicuous brown or black bracts. Flower heads are usually hidden inside the bush at ground level, where they are accessible to rodents. The insides of the bracts may be pale white and the tips of the flowers may be shiny red - both serve to guide the rodent to the nectar in the dark. The nectar is contained within the tepal tube, and the distance between the pollen presenter and the nectar is the same as the length of the rodent's snout (about 10 mm) allowing pollen to be deposited on the head. The nectar is rich in cane sugar (sucrose). Since most proteas flower in spring, nectar is available during the rodents' breeding period.

