

PEST CONTROL ADVICE SHEET

RATS



WHAT DO THEY LOOK LIKE?

The type of rat living near to houses is the Brown Rat (also called the Common or Sewer Rat).

The Brown Rat has a head and body length of between 20 to 30 cms (8" to 11") and has brown fur on its back and grey underneath, although sometimes black and white varieties are seen. The tail is shorter than the head and body and measures between 15 to 20 cms (6" and 8").

Although rats have good senses of smell and hearing, their whiskers provide them with such a good sense of touch that they can quite easily find their way around in complete darkness.

Rats are very agile and can even climb vertical walls if the surface is rough enough, but they are especially good at swimming.

WHAT DO THEY EAT?

Brown Rats will eat virtually any kinds of food, but generally prefer cereals, although they will attack other animals such as chicken or ducklings if necessary. They also need water to drink and can only live for a few days without it.

WHAT DAMAGE DO THEY DO?

A great deal of damage to foods is caused by rats gnawing through the food as well as urine and droppings. Rats carry a number of diseases which may affect people and other animals, such as Salmonella food poisoning and Weil's Disease, and therefore present a real risk to our health.

They also cause a great deal of damage by gnawing woodwork, water pipes, electric cables, and materials such as paper and textiles, and their burrowing activities have been known to cause subsidence in roads and pavements.

WHERE DO THEY LIVE?

Rats will live anywhere where there is food and shelter, but are mainly found around buildings such as warehouses and farm buildings. In towns they are usually found out of doors living in sewers, compost/rubbish heaps, under sheds or other similar places, in nests made of dry grass, leaves or paper. Rat holes are large, being some 8cms (3") in diameter, and their burrows may be many feet in length.

When nests are made indoors, they are usually in wall cavities or under floorboards and made of all sorts of household materials.

They live in groups, are usually shy, mainly active at night, and use set runs between their living quarters and their food supply. The distance they travel depends very much on how far they have to go to find food and water. If there is plenty available, they may live entirely in one building, but if necessary they will travel some distance (over ½ mile) each day to feed.

HOW CAN I GET RID OF RATS?

Many people, quite understandably, find the use of traps distasteful. There are now "live traps" available that will trap a rat without killing it. If you do choose these traps, ensure that you release the rat at a considerable distance from your house. If you don't, it could find its way back in again.

The use of poison is the commonest and one of the most humane methods of controlling rats. A variety of rat baits is on sale to the public, but they can be expensive and you may well not rid your home of rats.

Once rats have gone, it is important that you take certain steps to make sure that they do not return. Therefore:

1. Fill in all cracks and holes in outside walls more than 1.5cm (½") in width
2. Make sure that all doors close tightly
3. Mend old, damaged drains
4. Remove all food sources including removing any food put out either for pets or birds
5. Dustbins should have well fitted lids
6. Remove any possible shelter outdoors, which includes heaps of rubbish, compost and overgrown ground

SAFETY ADVICE

Children and pets must be kept away from poisons!