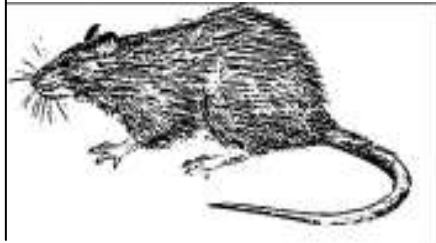


## Facts on Rats



### Why are rats a problem?

They contaminate everything they encounter with droppings, urine and hairs. They carry a wide range of diseases and parasites that are potentially harmful to humans and animals. Leptospirosis, or Weil's disease, can be fatal to humans. Other diseases, such as Toxoplasmosis and Salmonella, affect both humans and animals.

Another significant problem is the considerable structural damage that can occur due to the gnawing and burrowing behaviour of rats. Problems can range from minor holes in walls and doors and gnawed materials to structural collapse, flooding, electrical faults and fire. These risks should not be underestimated.

### Behaviour

Except when there are a lot of rats, or food is scarce, they will only come out at night, and daylight sightings are unlikely. Rats are suspicious of new objects or food, and some rats will dominate others and grab the best food.

As a rat's teeth grow continually, gnawing is a necessary behaviour. Almost any kind of material may be gnawed ie. electrical cable, water pipes. Rats burrow into grassy banks, underneath sheds and if given access can exploit cavities in walls and roof spaces of buildings that they use for harbourage, to store food and often nest. Rats prefer to live close to sources of both food and water.

Rats are also good climbers and can climb vertical walls if the surface is sufficiently rough. They can also climb along fences and up bird tables to access food. Rats are good swimmers and are often found near rivers and also in sewers.

Rats often move to buildings in autumn and winter for shelter and food, and return to the open countryside in the summer to feed on growing vegetation

### Population growth

Rats can breed even more efficiently than rabbits and large infestations can quickly develop if not controlled. Rats are capable of reproducing at about 3 months of age. After mating, pregnancy lasts for 21-24 days and averaging 6-11 young rats in a litter. 5 litters a year is typical.

### Prevention

To prevent a rodent infestation:

- Keep gardens clean and tidy, cutting back overgrown areas to minimise harbourage.
- If feeding wild birds, store food in containers, ensuring rats cannot reach the food. Any uneaten food will encourage rats to your garden.
- Inspect your property ensuring that there are no entry holes for rats to gain access into your home, ie. around waste pipes from the kitchen and bathrooms, central heating pipes and air vents.
- Ensure drains are covered and that manholes are intact ie. no rat holes are present in the near vicinity of the manhole.
- Ensure all household waste is enclosed in a rat proof container, eg wheelie bin.
- Keep doors closed to prevent access.

### Control

Methods of control include trapping and chemical control using fumigants or rodenticide baits. Please remember that rodenticides are also poisonous to humans, livestock, pets and wildlife and therefore should only be used by a 'competent' person and in accordance with *Think wildlife* code of practice. Rats behavioural characteristics must be taken into account to achieve effective control. Control should always be carried out together with preventative measures otherwise the underlying causes of the infestation remain and re-infestation will inevitably occur.

**For more detailed information and a free telephone consultation call 0845 838 0634.**

**Specialists in Pest and Vermin Control**