**Rats**

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**Rats are some of the most serious rodent pests in the world. They can carry diseases such as leptospirosis, salmonellosis and campylobacter and cause structural damage to buildings by gnawing and burrowing.**



The most common rat found in the UK is the brown or Norway rat (Rattus novegicus). The brown rat is generally brownish-grey in colour, with a paler greyish belly. An adult may weigh on average 340g.

The brown rat is a burrowing animal, and will live indoors, outdoors and in sewers. When brown rats are found in buildings it is usually due to holes in the fabric of the building and/or defective drainage. Rats will also emerge from any unblocked sewer, which includes dry toilet bowls.

Rats and mice are opportunistic and will take advantage of the food we waste as well as the food we provide for other more popular animals, such as garden birds or hedgehogs. They will seek access to our warm and cosy properties to set up home and rear their young. Rats generally prefer gardens to houses where they will set up home on or under the ground close to a ready food supply, such as seed put out for birds, or compost heaps (which are also a source of warmth).

The water vole, can sometimes be mistaken for the brown rat, particularly near canal or river banks. The water vole is a protected species.

**Identification**

1. Sightings of live rats.
2. Common rat droppings are usually 12mm long and taper at both ends.
3. Runs - rats follow the same routes when travelling, and leave trails through the grass and low vegetation.
4. Footprints and tail swipes - on muddy or dusty surfaces.
5. Smears - dark grey marks left on surfaces by repeated contact with rat fur.
6. Burrows - entrance holes 7 - 120mm in diameter in grassy banks, under tree roots, at the edge of paving or drain cover surrounds.
7. Nests - sometimes found indoors, in lofts or under floorboards.
8. Gnawing - rats gnaw continually, even on non- food materials, in order to wear down their front teeth.
9. Musky Smell from the urine.

**How to prevent Infestations**

Almost all rat ‘infestations’ are the result of bird feeding. Sixty per cent of UK households feed birds, and much of this food spills onto the garden or is scattered deliberately. This provides ample food for rats and mice. In order to deter rats, you need to remove or isolate the food source. Stop feeding wild birds until the rats or mice have gone, and make sure any human or bird food is stored in airtight containers. Be careful how food is disposed of, both in and outside the home. Being tidier will help deter rats in the first place.

Rats are ‘neo-phobic’ – they have a fear of new things – meaning they can’t tolerate constant disruption of their habitat. To deter them, therefore, keep grass short, thin out shrubs, remove cover such as piles of wood and debris around your garden and shed, carefully expose their tunnels and place obstacles in their ‘runs’. If this is done regularly, the unwanted visitors will disperse.

Animal repellents, such as ‘Get off my garden’, can be scattered where there are signs of rats and, particularly, around sheds. These products are readily available in garden centres and DIY shops. Ensuring your garden is as inhospitable as possible will deter rats and mice. But be aware - it is an offence to use any product or chemical as a repellent unless it is labelled as such and used in accordance with instructions.

**Summary**

• Reduce available food, and use airtight storage containers and bins

• Stop feeding wild birds and animals until the problem is resolved

• Block access to roof spaces and buildings

• Use animal repellent around sheds and problem areas

• Keep grass short and thin out shrubs

• Tidy storage areas and remove unwanted materials

• Tunnels can be carefully exposed to deter rats

• Keep altering the habitat by placing new obstacles in their way

**Treatment**

1. Treatment involves assessing the extent of the problem, laying baits or traps as necessary, checking the baits or traps regularly and removing the material at the end of the treatment.
2. Sometimes more than one treatment will be required to ensure control.

To find details of Pest Control Services in your area you can check your local paper, consult Yellow pages or contact the British Pest Control Association for local members on 01332 294288 or visit their website at www.bpca.org.uk