



Home-Owners Guide

PEST PROFILE - RODENTS

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Rats & Mice

Rodents are the most common mammals in the world, both in numbers and in variety. Australia has more than 60 species of native rodents. These natives rarely invade homes but some do cause problems in agriculture. There are also three introduced rodents:

<i>Rattus norvegicus</i>	the sewer or brown rat
<i>Rattus rattus</i>	the roof or black rat
<i>Mus musculus</i>	the house mouse.

It is the introduced rodents that cause the most damage to property and the native environment as well as common rodent infestations in urban areas.

These are known as **commensal rodents** – those that live with or near people and depend on humans for at least part of their food or shelter. They are often attracted to houses for food and shelter as the weather cools in autumn/winter or in tropical and sub-tropical areas during the wet season.

Rodents prominent incisor teeth grow continuously. ‘Rodent’ is derived from the Latin ‘rodere’ which means ‘to gnaw’. Gnawing is a natural and necessary survival behaviour of the rat and mouse. Rats and mice enjoy gnawing wires – a major cause of fires in houses worldwide.

Rodents contaminate our environment with their urine and droppings and by spreading disease. Rodents are known to be vectors of over *fifty* disease organisms including the causes of plague, leptospirosis, murine typhus and food poisoning such as salmonella and cryptosporidium.

Common Rodent Pest Species

SEWER RAT *Rattus norvegicus*

Originated in Central Asia. Large, aggressive, adaptable and sly.

ROOF RAT *Rattus rattus*

A native of the forests of equatorial Southeast Asia. It was the most common rat in urban areas in Europe during the outbreaks of plague.

HOUSE MOUSE *Mus musculus*

Believed to have originated in Central Asia. Mice adapted to structures associated with the storage and transport of grain, with their provision of shelter, warmth and food.

Commensal Rodent Identification Chart

	Sewer Rat	Roof Rat	House Mouse
Snout	Blunt	Pointed	Pointed
Ears	Small	Large	Large
Tail / body	Shorter	Longer	Body-length
Droppings	18mm Sausage-like	12mm Pointed	4mm Pointed
Weight (g)	340 – 460	150 - 250	13 – 30
Intake /day (g)	15 – 30	10 - 20	2 – 4
Food preference	Garbage	Fruit, nuts	Grains
Offspring / year	20	20	40 – 60
Gestation (days)	22	23	18 – 21
Litter size	4 – 10	4 – 8	5 – 6
Lifespan (mths)	5 – 12	5 - 18	12 – 24
Home range (m)	8 – 30	8 – 30+	2 – 10

**IT IS IMPORTANT TO CORRECTLY IDENTIFY THE SPECIES SO
EFFECTIVE CONTROL PROGRAMS CAN BE DESIGNED TO SUIT THE
BEHAVIOUR PATTERNS OF THAT SPECIES**

Effective Control Methods

INSPECTION

Look for droppings, dirty stains around possible entry points, nesting debris such as dry grass and papers and damage from chewing are all indicators of a rodent infestation.

HYGIENE

Mow the lawn, eliminate clutter, debris, rubbish and access to pet food (metal containers and take in at night). Limiting food, water and shelter makes it harder for the rodent to survive and increases the effectiveness of control strategies.

PROOFING

Keep them out! This may be simple or not practical – a mouse can get through a hole the size of the tip of your little finger, a rat requires the size of the tip of your thumb. The main areas of entry are doors, overhanging branches, vents and penetrations for plumbing and electricals.

TRAPPING

There are a variety of traps including curiosity traps, sticky boards and snap traps. The placement of these devices is critical to their success.

BAITING

This is the most common method used by Pest Managers and by the general public – the differences are that Pest Managers know which active ingredients and formulations are most suitable for the situation at hand and they will often integrate other actions listed above, depending on what they find in the inspection.

Helpful Hints

- Many properties are invaded every year as rats and mice seek food, water or shelter in cooler weather. Others may be invaded when nearby areas are developed or other changes to the environment occur. If you are aware of a potential influx, contact your Pest Manager to introduce a program before the event.
- Pet food is a major attraction for rodents. Ensure that all pet food is never left outside overnight and by storing in metal containers. Repair leaky taps and remove other water sources.
- The house should be inspected for potential entry points, concentrating on gaps in the wall, such as weep holes, doors and windows and penetrations for plumbing and electrical services.
- Trim all tree branches away from the house. Remove vines such as ivy and trellises from the walls.
- Rodents develop territories and have a social hierarchy. Not all will have equal access to baits. The most dominant and aggressive individuals tend to be the oldest and largest male members of the colony. Treatment programs must be designed to control the colony, rather than a few individuals.
- An adult house mouse produces 50 to 100 droppings and up to 3,000 micro-droplets of urine per day, a rat about 40 to 50 droppings per day or 15,000 droppings and over 10 litres of urine per year creating an obvious health risk.
- Rodents may die in inaccessible places such as wall cavities. Odours from dead mice are seldom a problem but rats, because of their larger body mass may cause an odour. Your Pest Manager may be able to find and remove the carcass or apply odour absorbing products.

The Amazing Capabilities of a Rat

It is difficult to rodent proof a building, and doing so is certainly impossible without understanding the amazing capabilities of rats. For example, Rats Can:

- Gain entry through any opening larger than 12mm in diameter
- Climb horizontal and vertical wires
- Climb the inside of vertical pipes/conduits 40-100mm diameter
- Climb the outside of vertical pipes/conduits up to 75mm diameter
- Jump vertically up to 1 meter from a flat surface
- Jump horizontally 1.2 meters on a flat surface
- Jump horizontally at least 2.4 meters from a height of 4.5 meters
- Fall 15 meters without being injured
- Burrow vertically in earth up to 1.5m
- Climb vertically on any semi rough surface
- Climb trees, shrubs or vines or crawl along telephone or power lines to gain access to upper floors of buildings
- Reach up to 33cm along a smooth vertical surface
- Swim as far as 1km in open water and dive through plumbing and sewer lines as well as swimming through strong currents
- Gnaw through a wide variety of materials including aluminium sheeting, adobe & hebel brick, timber cladding and more.

Tweed Valley



Pest Management

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