

RATS

The rat is a member of the rodent family. They are generally dull-coloured with coarse fur, long tails, large ears and a pointed snout.

Rats have extremely powerful teeth, with which they often gnaw through wooden planks to reach stores of food, and they have even been known to bite holes in lead pipes.

They are usually nocturnal and live in human habitations, forests, deserts and on seagoing ships. They are extremely prolific, breeding 1 to 13 times a year and producing 1 to 22 young in a litter.

Most species of rats are herbivorous, but some are omnivorous. Some rats carry a type of flea that can cause bubonic plague in human beings.

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The Latin name for this rat is *Rattus norvegicus*.

This is a medium to small mammal, with a body length of up to 28cm with a long thick scaly tail. The fur is shaggy and greyish-brown, often paler below, but variable in colour.

It is usually nocturnal and frequently occurs around houses and gardens, where it soon finds scraps or bird-food. It breeds all year round with 3-5 litters of up to 12 young, which leave the nest at 3 weeks, maturing at about 3 months.

Brown rats are important prey for many other species, including barn owls, stoats and foxes.

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The Latin name for this rat is *Rattus rattus*.

The black rat can grow up to 45cm long, with the tail being just over half that length. It is generally black, but rather variable, as it often appears brownish in colour, which means it can often be mistaken for the brown rat.

