

## Description

Britain is home to two kinds of rats:

- The common rat (or brown rat)
- The ship rat (or black rat)

The adult common rat may weigh from 100 to 500 grammes and has brown fur on its back and grey underneath; its tail is shorter than its head and body. The ship rat, which is far less common, is small and more lightly built, weighing only between 100 and 300 grammes. It may have black or brown fur, has large, almost hairless, ears and has a tail which is longer than the head and body, giving it greater agility.

## Distribution

The common rat is the most abundant and widespread species and can be found anywhere that offers shelter and food - including sewers. They are efficient burrowers and favour compost heaps and the ground underneath hedges and sheds where they will dig shallow burrows and form nests with dry grass leaves. In houses they will nest in wall cavities and beneath floor boards.

Ship rats will not normally be found indoors, but are found mainly in port areas, although they may be transported inland, with cargo. Being agile climbers and jumpers, ship rats will often nest in roof spaces and upper floors. Both species of rat are active mainly at night, but may be seen in search of food and water during the day.

## Significance

Rats are a major hazard to health. They spread many forms of disease, some of which can be fatal to man such as Weil's Disease. They may eat food which is intended for human consumption and they often damage much more which has to be discarded. Through their gnawing habit they also cause considerable structural damage to woodwork, waterpipes, electric cables and so on.

## Life cycle

The life expectancy of rats is around one year during which time a female will typically breed five times.

The average size of a litter is between seven and eight. Breeding occurs throughout the year but especially in the spring and autumn.

## Control

You will need professional help in controlling colonies of rats. Their ability to burrow, climb and jump, and the speed with which they breed and form new colonies, make rats difficult to control. You can assist us by ensuring that your premises are in good repair making it difficult for rats to gain access, and by removing any sources of food and water or clearing areas which may offer shelter or nesting materials, such as piles of timber or any areas of your garden which are overgrown.

In the event of infestation the Council's Pest Control Officer will visit and survey the area to determine the most appropriate control measures which may include the laying of poison baits along rat runs and in the drainage system. The baits must be left undisturbed and will be examined by the officer when a re-visit is made.

## Safety

All pesticides are applied by our qualified and experienced staff to ensure the safety of the public and to minimise damage to the environment.

