Common Rat (Rattus Norvegicus)
Black Rat (Rattus Rattus)

WATFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL

Information & Treatment Advice

Rats:

There are only 2 species of rat found in the UK, the Common Rat (Rattus Norvegicus) also known as the Brown Rat or Sewer Rat, and the much rarer Ship or Black Rat (Rattus Rattus) which is confined to a few sites in dockland areas. Only the Common Rat is found throughout the UK and typically has brown fur but this can vary from dark grey to pale brown. Adults can reach up to 270mm (10") with a tail of 200mm (8"). The average weight is 350gms (12oz).

The Common Rat is a very adaptable creature, able to live under or above ground. It is an excellent climber, persistent burrower and a good swimmer.

Life Cycle:

Rats are sexually mature at 12 weeks and the female is able to produce a litter of 6-11 young every 21-24 days. The young are weaned at 3 weeks. Most rats die before they reach 12 months.

Problems:

Rats are well known for their disease carrying capabilities. In addition to being linked to the spread of the plague, they are also carriers of Weils Disease (Leptospirosis), Murine Typhus and Salmonella. They are also host to a variety of parasites including tapeworm, ringworm, fleas and mites.

Rats can cause an immense amount of damage, either by chewing electrical wiring for instance, or from contaminating foodstuffs with their droppings and urine. Up to 5% of food production is lost annually. They are also responsible for damage caused to sewers and drains by their tunnelling.

Rats have similar requirements to humans i.e. shelter, food and water. Rats need to drink 60ml of water a day and require 30g of food. Remove the shelter, food source and/or water and there is nothing to attract them. The most common attractions are compost heaps and food put out for birds.

Rats are good climbers and can also jump up to 3 metres, they are able to squeeze through a gap of less than 2.5cm. which makes them very adept at being able to enter premises.

Signs of rats

The following are signs that rats may be present:

- Droppings - may be seen which are cigar shaped and around 1cm in length
- Damage - rats have to gnaw constantly and as a result may cause damage to belongings, structures, pipes and electric cables
- Noises - may be heard from under floors, behind walls or in the loft
- Smears - black greasy marks maybe left by rats running over prominent objects over a long period of time

- Holes — may be seen (5-7cm diameter) in the garden with a smooth entry

Control:

To prevent rats from becoming established in your property you should ensure that you have no accumulations of garden rubbish which may provide a food source or harbourage. If you have a compost bin, then it is advisable to stand it on a concrete base or a 1” wire mesh to prevent rats from tunnelling into the bin.

Likely entry points into buildings are broken or missing airbricks, gaps around pipework, gaps under exterior and garage doors and faulty drains. Older properties with cast iron soil vent pipes should have a wire balloon fitted to the top of the soil stack. If your foul drain has an intercepted manhole you should ensure the interceptor cap is in place. Where there is no interceptor it is recommended that a non-return valve (Rat Flap) is fitted preventing rats from entering your underground drainage. Thames Water may fit these on your behalf.

Bird feeding

Wild bird feeding is now one of the most common reasons for rat infestations around domestic homes. To reduce attraction of rats to your garden you should:

- Use suspended wire feeders with trays for waste
- Not put bird food directly on the ground
- Only put out enough bird food for the day and clear any spillages
- Guidelines are provided by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. You can contact them at **www.rspb.org.uk**

If you have seen signs of rats at your property and you are in receipt of a means tested benefit, then you can book a pest control treatment via Watford Council on 01923 226400.