

SHARING OUR SPACES: RATS AND MICE



Practical advice for living alongside our wild neighbours

Rats and mice have coexisted with humans for centuries and, despite our best efforts to kill and demonise them, these shy, nocturnal, and highly intelligent individuals remain consistent throughout the UK. They choose to live close to people because of the availability of the food we waste - as well as the food we provide for more popular animals, like birds and hedgehogs – and the warmth of our properties.

Their populations are frequently overstated by so-called 'pest' control companies in a bid to win more work, capitalising on how mice and rats have been demonised throughout history. Much of the fear around rats stems from the Black Death 700 years ago. While it is true that rats – along with all animals – carried and may have spread the disease, the same is true of humans. Because rats have been so maligned, their reputation means that there are virtually no positive stories about them and methods of dealing with them are often lethal, causing severe and prolonged suffering, despite being ineffective.

This factsheet is designed to provide practical advice for living alongside them.

SUMMARY

- Reduce available food, using airtight containers and secure bins
- Stop feeding wild birds and other animals until the problem is solved
- Block access to roof spaces, buildings, and gaps in fences
- Keep your home and garden clean and tidy
- Use a harmless repellent around sheds and areas of concern
- Purchase a plug-in sonic repellent for indoor spaces



Gaining access

Mice will typically seek access to your food and home through air bricks, vents, or gaps around gas, water and cable holes, or drainpipes – they can squeeze through holes as small as 25mm!

What can you do?

Block all access gaps with wire wool, 'mice mesh', or a sealant that will harden quickly. Only block holes once you are sure that no animals are trapped inside.

Sonic repellents can also be used to evict unwanted visitors. These are plug-in devices that emit ultrasonic and/or electromagnetic waves, which are harmless but encourage mice and rats to vacate. These devices are inexpensive and widely available online, or in DIY stores.

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Damage to food and property

Rats and mice seeking shelter will choose a location that also offers a ready food supply. This can be most of the foods we eat, but also common household items we wouldn't think of, like soap!



What can you do?

It's vital to clean all areas where food may be present: cupboards, floors, and cracks where food may have dropped, like down the side of the cooker. The cleanliness must be consistent as even normal daily use of a kitchen can produce enough crumbs to sustain one or two mice! Storing all food items in cupboards that are inaccessible or in airtight containers will also deter hungry visitors.

'Humane traps' are those that do not harm the animals and are available at most garden centres and DIY stores. Bait these with chocolate or peanut butter, and then release your visitor far from your property, near a garden shed for example, and ideally with a little food or water to encourage them to stay away from your home.

In your garden

Rats generally prefer gardens to houses. They will set up home on or under the ground, close to a ready food supply, such as compost heaps (also a source of warmth) or bird feed. The problem with rats is more about their reputation than reality, and the so-called 'pest' control industry desperately pedals misinformation to keep business afloat.

What can you do?

Almost all 'infestations' are the result of bird feeding, which provides ample food for rats and mice. To deter unwanted visitors, you need to remove or isolate the food source. Stop feeding wild birds until the rats or mice have left and make sure any food – both for humans and birds – is stored in airtight containers. Be careful how food is disposed of both inside and outside the home, as generally being tidier will deter rats in the first place.

Rats are neophobic – a fear of new things – meaning they can't tolerate constant disruption and changes to their habitat. To deter them, therefore, keep grass short, thin out shrubs, remove debris or piles of wood, place obstacles in the way of their 'runs' or access points if you know where these are. If this is done regularly, the unwanted visitors will disperse.

Harmless repellents, such as Get Off My Garden, readily available in garden centres and DIY centres, can also be scattered where there are signs of rats and mice, for example around sheds.

It's important to remember that rats and mice mean us no harm; they live short lives and already have many predators to cope with. As well as learning to be more tolerant of these little creatures, these techniques should ensure that we can happily coexist.

For more advice contact Humane Wildlife Solutions:
www.humanewildlifesolutions.co.uk or phone 07771 361226

