



Rats! What, Where, and How

What, Where, and How

<https://youtube.com/watch?v=HaxYaORPC-U>

<https://nerdfighteria.info/v/HaxYaORPC-U>

Welcome back to Animal Wonders, I'm Jessi, and today we're gonna talk about rats. Rats are widely known for some of their less desirable traits and I don't think that's very fair. They get the short end of the stick a lot of the time. I mean, they were blamed for the black plague which actually was most likely caused by gerbils, not rats.

And their tail isn't naked. It's actually a lot more like our bodies, I means you can see the skin, but there's tiny hairs all over. And they're not any dirtier than other animals. They clean themselves more often than a cat. Since I'm quite fond of our little rat friends, I would like to share some more enlightening information about these highly intelligent, highly adaptable rodents. Here's our What, Where, How on rats.

(Animal Wonders intro plays)

The term rat is used informally when describing a small, pointy-nosed mammal with a "naked tail" but we're looking for a more scientific definition, so what is a rat? The most common rat is the brown rat, followed closely by the black rat, but let's define them with taxonomy.

The order is Rodentia, meaning they have two ever-growing incisors on the top and the bottom. Family is muridae, meaning small rodents with long, scaled tails and prominent whiskers. This broad grouping includes gerbils, mice and rats. There are over 700 species in this family. Genus is ratus, meaning that they originated in the old world. Biologically speaking, this includes the paleo-Arctic and afro-tropic regions. There are over 60 species in this genus including the palm rat, brush rat, black rat, which just means that's a lot of rats.

And now we've come to the most common rat species, norvegicus, commonly called the Norwegian rat. It was given this name because at the time they thought it came from Norway. This is incorrect, so I prefer the common name "brown rat." Ratus norvegicus, the largest in the muridae family, these guys are large, heavy-bodied rodents and covered in brown or grey fur, or in his case cream... sicle.

Naturalists have determined that the most likely origin of the brown rat is from Asia, more specifically Northern China and Mongolia, and records suggest that they may have been present in Europe as early as 1553. Brown rats became established along human migration routes, and they displaced the once common black rat due to their larger, more aggressive behavior, and their ability to adapt to human habitations. And they followed humans everywhere. By the late 1700s, They had reached every continent except Antarctica. Rats are amazing survivors!

So rats are considered commensal because they derive benefit from humans while humans derive no benefit or harm from rats. Fast forward to the modern times. Rats have gone from sneaking into caravans and stowing away on ships to being welcomed into human homes as pets. Though they're still prevalent in the wild, living in large colonies, breeding rapidly, and taking advantage of every environment that they can survive in.

Humans have bred them extensively and selected for very specific traits, which has resulted in a wide variety of colors, patterns, and physical morphologies. Take Pims for example. His color and pattern are beige and hooded, his fur is wavy and so are his whiskers, so he's considered a "rex," and his ears are big and placed low on his head, so he's considered a "dumbo." So he is a beige, hooded, rex, dumbro rat.

Now we know what they are and how they came from, let's talk about how we provide the best care for companion rats. Let's start

with the enclosure. It should be big enough to promote an active lifestyle, with plenty of climbing, bounding and toy space. A two to three level wire enclosure is good. If the shelves are made out of wire, make sure there are places with solid flooring, in case the wire hurts their feet, or you can add on ledges all around the enclosure.

Moving on to their bedding: it should be absorbent so it can soak up their urine and make cleanup easier. I recommend a paper-based product like pet's preference or carefresh because they're super absorbent and made from recycled materials. Never use cedar, pine, or aspen because the oils in the wood can irritate the rat's sensitive respiratory system. I'm using rats plural because they really shouldn't be housed singly. Rats are highly social and they need rat companionship to be happy.

To make the space comfortable for your rats, provide furniture. When I say furniture I'm talking about the objects inside their home that they're gonna climb and lay in, on, and under. Huts, hammocks, and couches are great. Next, add the toys. You're gonna want to give them something to chew and gnaw on because they have ever-growing teeth. Their teeth can grow up to five inches in one year, so this is really important. The next toy to get is things that they can explore like beads and bells or just other fun things to play with. Now they will chew on everything, so make sure all toys are safe to ingest.

Next comes diet which includes water. Use a water bottle because a bowl is just gonna get spilled because they like to investigate under things. Don't use a plastic bottle, use a glass one because like I said they like to chew. Their food diet should focus on balanced nutrition and incisor maintenance. I recommend something called rodent block or lab chow. It's the most complete diet for rats and if fed alone, it will keep your rats nutritionally healthy. You can also supplement their diet with veggies, nuts, seeds, and grains, and occasionally a small sweet treat like fruit but only in small amounts and I mean small for a rat, not for a human.

And now to interact with your rat. Place your hand inside their enclosure and just let it sit there. Rats are naturally curious, but they're also cautious. When they feel safe and confident they will come and investigate. Once their comfortable with your hand, you can touch and stroke them. Younger rats often like to play chase and roughhouse with your hand while older rats often enjoy calmer interactions. Pick them up by wrapping your fingers around their body, lifting them up, and placing them on a flat palm. Then just let the go wherever they want to explore, your arms, shoulder, lap, or legs.

Rats are intelligent and can enjoy human companionship. They can be clicker train using positive reinforcement, and you'd be surprised how many things they can learn. But wait, there's more! Rats can see color, mostly blues, greens, and greys, but they can also see ultraviolet. Now, their vision isn't very sharp and their depth perception is weak but they're extremely sensitive to variations in light. And rats use verbal communication frequently, but most of their vocalizations are inaudible to humans. We can hear between 20 hertz and 20 kilohertz, but a rat alarm call is 22 kilohertz, and a happy friendly call is 50 kilohertz. The amazing ratus norvegicus has followed us around the world and if you've ever gotten to know one personally, I think you'll agree that they are a unique, amazing and lovable animal.

Thanks for learning about rats with me and Pims! If you'd like to go on an adventure with us every week, subscribe to our YouTube channel Animal Wonders Montana, or if you have any questions for me, you can find me on twitter, Tumblr and Facebook. Thanks guys.

(endscreen)