

RATS

All About America's Favorite Pet Rats

3 | Editor's Note: How Cool Are Rats!

You can't get much cooler than a rat. Some people don't seem to have the appreciation for these great creatures that they deserve, but that's OK. For the rest of us phobia-free pet owners, the rat encompasses the best qualities of a companion animal: intelligent, inquisitive, sociable. You'll never be bored with a rat as your friend.

4 | The One For You

This all-inclusive guide helps you find your perfect rat match.

By Stacy N. Hackett

With whiskers wiggling, nose twitching and paws waving, that adorable pet rat practically begs to come home with you. You'd love to have the furry friend join your family, but you wonder if it will be as healthy and happy once you bring it home. Want to feel more confident about your selection? Follow these three steps below.

1. Look For Overall Good Health

The No. 1 characteristic to look for in a new pet rat is good health. "One should look for a healthy, well-tempered young rat," said Chrissy Knight of the Dallas area of Texas, a long-time rat owner who breeds under the name Rattius Maximus. "A healthy rat will have shiny clear eyes with no porphyrin discharge, and yellow- to orange-tinted teeth."

14 | In Good Company

One rat or two? Follow this advice.

By Anastasia Thrift

Rats need company. As much as people would like to be their primary companions, are they able to fulfill that need?

Solitary vs. Social

Fanciers are firm on the subject. They stress that rats should never be kept alone. "It gets repeated so many times that people are fanatic about it," said Marie Osborn of Warm Fuzzies Rattery in Texas. While pet stores will sell young people single rats, breeders such as Osborn hesitate to do so. "I never place single babies. They really need a cagemate at that age [under 3 months]."

18 | Battle of the Sexes

When a rat steals your heart, does its gender matter?

By Rose Gordon

Should you adopt a male or a female rat? Most experts agree that both genders can make great companions, but there are subtle personality and physical differences between the two.

Personality Plus

Boys are generally more laid-back, while the girls are more silly and playful, said Elisabeth Brooks of Spoiled Ratten Rattery in Kansas City, Missouri, and an affiliate club chairman for the Rat Society of America. Someone who prefers a rat to hold on their lap might prefer a male, but someone who enjoys a more active rat that goes romping around the room might want to adopt a girl, she added. Yet, Brooks said that she has had boys that are overly active and girls that are overly cautious.

22 | Decode Your Rat's Behavior

Examine which actions are normal, which aren't, and what they mean.

By Carol Lawton

Rats in the wild are prey animals – omnivorous scavengers with a remarkable ability to reproduce and survive under the worst of conditions. They are low on the food chain and born to be suspicious of the unknown, but their will to survive drives them to explore new situations. Wild rats are social creatures preferring life in a colony. These wild traits make our

domesticated rats the curious, outgoing, little creatures that we enjoy so much.

Gender Roles

Each animal has a job in the wild. Female rats are born to produce more rats, which involves a constant search for food, finding a male rat, building a nest, delivering and nursing the babies, gathering food for them as they get older, and becoming pregnant again before the first litter has left the nest. This is a hectic, busy lifestyle and future generations depend on it.

30 | Home Sweet Home

Create a comfy abode for your rat.

By Eve Adamson

When Diane Newburg brought home her first rat, Jennifer, in 1991, she also brought home a little galvanized wire cage with one level and a running wheel. But when Newburg gave Jennifer time to roam outside the cage, Jennifer decided it was moving day.

"She took everything out of her cage and put it on a nearby filing cabinet. Her washcloth, her litter box, everything. I thought it was funny at the time, but really, how would you like to sleep in your toilet? She hardly had any room in there at all," Newburg said. Today, Newburg rescues rats and keeps them in an expansive rat room in her Culver City, Calif., home.

38 | Life With A Rat

How a rat roommate will change your life.

By Debbie Ducommun

You've done it. You've got a pet rat for a roommate – so what do you do now? First, rats are intelligent, curious and affectionate, and therefore need time out of their cages every day to play, explore and interact with you. This playtime can be at any time of the day or night that fits into your schedule, as long as it occurs at the same time each day. Rats are nocturnal, so it is natural for them to be active in the evening or early morning. But, if you want to play with your rats at noon every day, they will be happy to do so and will be waiting for you.

45 | Time To Visit The Vet

Inside the top 10 threats to your rat's health.

By Jill Partlow, DVM

Rats hide illness well, so monitor their appetites and activity levels daily to discover illness as soon as possible. General signs of illness in rats include scruffy and unkempt fur, decreased appetite and activity level. If you suspect your rat is sick, take it to the veterinarian for treatment right away.

Below are the causes and symptoms of 10 common ailments in pet rats.

Respiratory Disease

Both viruses and bacteria contribute to respiratory disease, the most common ailment seen in rats. They often carry the bacteria and viruses in their systems, but periods of stress, increased ammonia in the environment (caused by poor cage husbandry) and advanced age may weaken a rat's immune system and open the door to this disease. Respiratory disease can begin with a sneeze and progress to pneumonia.

48 | Rat 911

Do you know how to respond in an emergency?

By Karla S. Rugh, DVM, Ph.D.

In a perfect world, your rat would never need first aid. However, the world is far from perfect and some rats seem to get into trouble every time they turn around. If your little buddy is one of these – or even if it's not – you'll rest easier if you know some basic first aid.

Bleeding

Bleeding almost always looks worse than it really is. Animals don't react to injuries the way people do, so if your rat is bleeding, chances are it's going to continue its normal activities – and smear blood everywhere in the process. It's even worse if your rat is white – even a little blood on a white coat can look scary.

58 | Come And Get It!

A nutritional diet = healthy, active pet.

By Sharon Vanderlip, DVM

Rats and humans are more similar than you'd think. Just like humans, rats are omnivores, meaning they can eat a wide variety of foods and are not limited to a meat diet or plant diet.

Because of the many biological and physiological similarities between rats and humans, rats have been used more than other species in laboratory studies to learn about nutrition, the effects of dietary deficiencies and excesses, and dietary diseases. As a result, the nutritional ramifications of poor eating habits, nutrient deficiencies, malnutrition and overeating are well-known and apply to rats as well as humans. For example, just like us, rats that do not consume a balanced diet can suffer from a variety of health problems, including obesity, diabetes, cancer and premature death.

68 | Growing Pains

How to take good care of your rat through all its life stages.

By Audrey Pavia

Did you know rats experience life stages similar to our own? Just as with humans, rats go through different phases of development that affect both their minds and their bodies.

Understanding the various chapters in your rat's development can help you take better care of your pet as it progresses through life. It can also enable you to appreciate your rat as it grows from youngster to senior rat-citizen.

76 | The Manicured Rat

Keep your rat well-groomed with these simple steps.

By Wendy Bedwell-Wilson

You've managed to find one of the few self-sufficient pets out there – these exceptional creatures can groom themselves. However, they still require your help with nail trimming, brushing, and tooth cleaning.

"Rats are incredibly fastidious animals," said Michelle Hawkins, VDM, DABVP, at the University of California, Davis. "They groom themselves."

80 | The Taming Game

Transform your rat into a happy, sociable pet.

By Dale Jean Taylor

One hundred years of domestication have only taken your rat so far. Help your rat become an even better pet by putting in some quality one-on-one time every day. This time spent interacting with your rat will strengthen your bond and help your rat's socialization process. Let the fun begin!

Welcome Home

The day your rat moves in can be traumatic, so respect your rat's need for quiet time. Allow it two or three hours to explore its new house and become comfortable with the common smells and noises of its new world. Some rats become comfortable right away, while others may take a little longer to feel safe. Even rats that have been socialized from birth can become nervous in a new home and around new people. Sudden movement will startle a rat, so discourage anyone from reaching in the cage and grabbing.

86 | From Pest To Pet

Follow the rat from Europe to America.

By Scott L. Andresen

The fancy rat or pet rat is typically associated with one species, the brown rat (*Rattus norvegicus*), also called the Norway rat. It's this larger rat, not the smaller roof rat (*Rattus rattus*) that gets all the attention. So, why did the brown rat become the rat of choice?

"When both rats are introduced into the same environment, the Norway rat generally dominates," said Brian Lee of the San Francisco Bay Area chapter of the Rat and Mouse Club of America. "In the United States, the roof rat is common only in a few warm coastal areas where they manage to share territory with the Norway rat, but the Norway rat is common everywhere. I believe the same is true in Europe. So I can only speculate that when most people started keeping some of

the wild rats, they were mostly Norway rats.”

90 | The Trick To Training

The intelligent rat easily masters tricks such as running a labyrinth, hoop-jumping and bowling.

By Nikki Moustaki

Urban rats learn to visit the same trash can repeatedly if goodies can always be found inside. But there's more to rats than just the instinct to survive – they appreciate affection too.

Animal trainers have found that positive reinforcement is the only effective training method for rats. "All the training of my rats is done by reward – food or attention – and never punishment," said Deb Mallett of Somerset, England, who is the fun-events coordinator for the Midlands Rat Club. "They don't understand what they have done 'wrong,' and to punish them will only scare them and make them less willing to participate another time."

100 | Walk On The Wild Side

Untangle the mystery of your pet's ancestry.

By Ifsha Buttiitta

Often portrayed in movies and books as vile creatures that will attack humans the first chance they get, rats in fact have something of a love/hate relationship with humans. Still feared by some because of their long-standing reputation as vermin, rats also are increasingly popular as pets because they can be tame and affectionate.

In the scientific research setting, rats are highly sought because their intelligent, complex behavior makes them perfect models for studying everything from learning behavior to memory. All rats, however, share a common past – they come from the wild.

104 | On With The Show

Enter the century-old hobby of rat showing.

By Nancy Ferris

If you believe owning a pet rat caused your friends to raise their eyebrows, wait until you tell them you show rats, too. Rat shows got their start in England in the early 1900s, often held in conjunction with mouse shows. They remained popular until the 1920s, and then interest picked up again in the mid-1970s and spread to the United States. Since then, many clubs have formed in the United States, and the popularity of rat shows has spread to the Netherlands, Germany, Finland, Australia and New Zealand.

110 | Meeting The Standard

Will your rat be a champion on the show circuit?

By Nichole Royer

First-time visitors to rat and mouse shows are often astounded at the rainbow of colors and the diversity of coat types and varieties displayed on the judging table. Blue rats, Siamese rats, pearl rats, rats with curly hair, and even rats that are completely bald often find themselves competing against each other. Picking a winner from such a huge assortment may seem like a daunting task, but judges base their decision on a guide. That guide is called the standard.

116 | Red-Carpet Rats

These celebrity rats have entered your home through movies, TV, music and books.

By Anton J. Souza

Nobody can deny that rats have played a significant role in world culture and history. They have lived among humans for centuries, as both pests and pets. But are rats a part of pop culture? As someone who has eaten "gummy rats," I definitely answer, "Yes!"

Although they can be cute and fuzzy to some, for others they represent counterculture. Many nonconformist icons have been associated with this image, from Frank Sinatra and his Rat Pack, to the hot-rodding character Rat Fink, to the loudmouth Muppet Rizzo the Rat.

122 | 30 Fascinating Facts

Amaze your friends with rat trivia.

By Kevin Schargen

For many people, the word "rat" stimulates thoughts of sooty sewers and disastrous diseases. But for millions of discerning pet fanciers, this naked-tailed rodent with the poor image has become a prized companion. Remarkable intelligence, boundless curiosity, and meticulous grooming habits are just a few of the surprises that await the keeper of a pet rat.

Here are 30 additional reasons to perk up the next time you find yourself in a conversation about *Rattus norvegicus*:

Intelligence

1. Rats are capable of learning a bagful of tricks. With dedication (and the right treats), a rat can even learn to respond to its name and use an in-cage litter box.

126 | Picture Perfect Rats

128 | Resources