
“Fancy” Brown Rat

(*Rattus norvegicus domestica*)

Class: *Mammalia*

Order: *Rodentia*

Family: *Muridae*

Characteristics: Short, dense fur covers the brown rat’s body except for the nose, tail and ears which are bald. Natural color ranges from gray to brown with lighter coloring on the underside. They have also been bred as pets to be white, black or brown. Length averages 16 inches, including tail (40 cm), and weight averages 0.5-1.0 lb (200-500 grams). Males are usually larger than females. Fancy rats are the domesticated form of the brown rat and are the most common type of rat kept as a pet.

Behavior: Brown rats live in large, male dominated groups with hierarchy being determined by the males’ sizes. Prefer to live anywhere there are humans. They live by foraging and survive on a high range of foods, including fish, as they are good swimmers. In urban areas they live largely on discarded human food, or from cupboards or crops from fields. Communication is by a variety of methods including vocalization and visual posturing to communicate among themselves. They are most active at dusk and during the night.

Reproduction: Females reach sexual maturity at four months and males at three. Females are polygynandrous (multiple partners) and competition among males delays reproductive maturity for younger smaller male rats. Breeding is not seasonal though it increases in warmer months. Females experience a six-hour period of estrus during which they mate as many as 500 times with multiple competing males. Males are able to ejaculate multiple times thus having a greater assurance of impregnating the females. Gestation lasts 22-24 days. Resulting litters average 8 pups which take 2 weeks to open their eyes and which will nurse for 3-4 weeks and then leave the nest. Multiple females and litters may share a nest, and females will nurse and provide care of other females’ offspring.

Diet:

Wild: Discarded human food, plants, fish, lizards, chicks other rodents

Zoo: Rodent block (a dried food much like dog food), fruits and vegetables.

Conservation: A common species with no major threats. Listed as Least Concern.

Fun Facts: AKA common rat, street rat, sewer rat, Hanover rat, Norway rat, Norwegian rat, Parisian rat, water rat, and wharf rat.

A study of one rat’s stomach contents revealed over 4,000 different items.



Range & Habitat:



Native to Northern China. Now found on every continent except Antarctica. Live in forests, open fields, sewers, burrows, buildings - almost anywhere humans are present.

Lifespan: up to 4 years in captivity, 2 years in the wild.

Special Adaptations: Unlike cats, can move whiskers each individually for feeling and sensing

IUCN Conservation Status:

