

Rat

Rattus.Spp

What does it look like?

There are three species of rat in Southland; Norway rat, ship rat and kiore.

Norway rats are the largest of the three rat species. They are found mainly in wet habitats and in areas associated with human activity. Their coats are grey-brown and shaggy with a pale underside. They are distinguished from the ship rat in that the tail, which can be up to 180 mm in length, is thick and shorter than the body, which is up to 200 mm in length.

Ship rats are smaller than Norway rats and are found in most habitats, and are now the most abundant and widespread rat in Southland. Their tails are larger, thicker and longer than Norway rats and exceeds the body length. They also have larger ears than Norway rats.

Kiore were introduced to New Zealand by early Polynesian settlers, but are much less common in Southland and smaller compared to the other rat species. They are restricted to Fiordland, Stewart Island/Rakiura and some offshore islands.

Rats are mainly nocturnal. They have a varied diet that includes native birds, eggs, chicks, invertebrates, frogs, and lizards. They eat large quantities of native seeds, either from the ground or straight from the tree (as in the case of Ship rats, which can climb high into the canopy).

Why is it a problem?

Since their arrival in New Zealand, rats have had significant impacts on native flora and fauna. Ship rats in particular can reach high numbers in forests and reduce forest health through feeding on flowers, fruit, seed and seedlings. Rats have been implicated in the decline of many native species including the Bellbird (Korimako), Robin (Toutouwai), Stitchbird (Hihi), Saddleback (Tiekie), Native Thrush, Parakeets (Kakariki), Flightless Weevil and Giant Weta.

Rats are prolific breeders. They can breed throughout the year if conditions are suitable, with a female producing up to five litters a year. They can live for 3 years but wild animals probably live for less than a year.



Control methods

Options for controlling rats include:

- Poisoning
- Trapping
- Prevention

Poisoning

Poisoning can be an effective method to control a rat infestation or to achieve control over a large area. Most rat poisons are anticoagulants and following a lethal dose (often a from single feed), rats generally die in 5 to 10 days.

It's recommended poison baits are placed within purpose built rat-bait stations to protect bait from the weather and protect non-target animals (like pets and birds) from feeding on bait directly. Placing bait in bait stations will help prevent rats removing bait and storing in other locations. Ensure to use enough approved bait stations for the area you are trying to control (e.g. within forest spaced along lines no more than 50 m apart, with lines 100 m apart). Check bait stations regularly, if all the bait is gone within the first night of baiting, more bait stations are required. Remove any mouldy bait and replace with fresh bait.

Care with poisons

- Always read the label before using poison. Make sure you follow instructions and understand the symptoms of accidental poisoning and how to treat it.
- Put rat baits in secure places away from children, pets and stock.
- In case of accidental human consumption, contact the:

National Poisons Centre on 0800 764 766 for advice.

- Rat poison can be extremely harmful to dogs and cats. Symptoms can take several days to appear. They may include lack of appetite, lethargy, bleeding from the nose or mouth and pale gums). Vitamin K can be used as an antidote. Call your vet immediately if an animal accidentally eats rat bait.

There are a wide range of baits and bait stations available for purchase from local retail, garden and farm supply stores or from online suppliers.

Trapping

Trapping is best suited to small rat infestations in and around buildings. It is particularly suitable in buildings, where using poison and having rats die inside is not ideal. Trap covers can be made out of coreflute (the material that real estate signs are made of). These keep the lure dry and prevent other animals being caught. These should be blocked at one end and tall enough that your traps can operate properly. Traps need to be checked and lured regularly, peanut butter works well as lure.

Prevention

There are some simple ways to make an environment less appealing to rats:

- Remove any cover that rats can live in, including long grass or rubbish.
- Get rid of potential food sources or store them in rat-proof containers.

Related links

Landcare Research - Vertebrate Pest Control <https://pestdss.landcareresearch.co.nz/BestPractice>

Predator Free 2050 - DOC Trapping Guide <https://www.doc.govt.nz/nature/pests-and-threats/predator-free-2050/community-trapping/>

Predator Free NZ - Pest Control Suppliers Information <https://predatorfreenz.org/resources/where-to-buy-equipment/>

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Summary of rules

Stewart Island/Rakiura Only:

You can not possess, keep, hold, enclose or otherwise harbour Rat on Stewart Island/Rakiura or any other island within the site-led area (see map).

You cannot take Rat to Stewart Island/Rakiura or any other island within the site-led area (see map)

For full rules please see the [Southland Regional Pest Management Plan](#) (Rule 25).

Request info

<https://eservices.es.govt.nz/online-services/new/BiosecurityRFS/step/1?Subject=AnimalPests&Species=87>

Management programme

Site-led programme

Organisms of interest