

# Rat

## *Rattus.Spp*

### What does it look like?

There are two common species of rat found on mainland New Zealand; Norway rats (*Rattus norvegicus*) and ship rats (*Rattus rattus*): both have a significant impact on native flora and fauna, and potentially on human health.

Norway rats are the larger of the two European rats found in New Zealand. Their coats are grey-brown and shaggy with a pale underside. They are distinguished from the ship rat in that the tail, which is about 180 mm in length, is thick and shorter than the body, which is about 200 mm in length. Ship rats are smaller than Norway rats but their tails are longer than their bodies.

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. Ship rats are good climbers and will get right up into the canopy of trees. They are found in most habitats and are the most abundant and widespread rat on mainland New Zealand. Norway rats swim well and are common in wet habitats and urban areas, spending most of their time on the ground.

### Why is it a problem?

Since their arrival in New Zealand, Norway and ship rats have had significant impacts on native flora and fauna. They have been implicated in the decline of many native species including the bellbird (korimako), robin (toutouwai), stitchbird (hihi), saddleback (tīeke), native thrush (piopio), parakeets (kakariki), flightless weevil and giant weta. Between these two species of rat and the kiore (*Rattus exulans*), which is only found on several offshore islands, there are no habitat types that go unexploited for food resources.

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



## Control Methods

Options for controlling rats include:

- Poisoning
- Trapping
- Prevention

### Poisoning

Poisoning is an effective way to control rats outdoors. Most rat poisons are anticoagulants and a continuous feed of bait over 10 days is necessary.

Purpose built rat-bait stations keep the bait dry, protect non-target animals (like pets and birds) and shield the poison from the weather. You need to use enough approved bait stations for the area you are trying to control.

### Where to buy

You can buy bait stations from GW and most farm supply stores.

### Using bait stations

- Place four to six pellets in each approved bait station. Secure the bait using wire to prevent rats taking the poison away.
- It only takes a little poison to kill a rat. It takes about a week for a poisoned rat to die.
- Remove any mouldy or wet bait.
- For smaller areas, place bait stations at 50 metre intervals. For larger areas, place bait stations at 100 metre intervals along the ground or on a tree.
- Check bait stations regularly.

### 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.

### Trapping

Trapping is best suited to small rat infestations. It is particularly good 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.

Traps used to kill rats include: modified Victor Pro trap with tunnel, Victor Pro trap with tunnel, BT200, DOC200, BT250, DOC250, Monster trap, Goodnature A24 rat and stoat trap.

More information about these traps can be found at the Trapping link below.

Watch this video explaining how to set some of the traps that we supply: [How to trap and kill rats](#)

### 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/Rodents/Location>

GW Regional Pest Management Plan <https://www.gw.govt.nz/environment/pest-management/>

Trapping <https://www.gw.govt.nz/environment/pest-management/pest-animals/trapping/>

Predator Free Wellington <https://www.pfw.org.nz/our-project/contact-us/>

Rat or wētā droppings? <https://www.pfw.org.nz/resources/biosecurity-monitoring/rat-or-w-t-droppings/>

Backyard trapping groups <https://www.pfw.org.nz/trapping/>

Rat proofing your compost <https://www.pfw.org.nz/resources/general/how-to-rat-proof-your-compost/>

Rat facts and control tips <https://predatorfreenz.org/toolkits/know-your-target-predators/rat/>

An Urban Predator-Free Blueprint [https://www.pfw.org.nz/site/assets/files/2550/an\\_urban\\_eradication\\_blueprint\\_-\\_predator\\_free\\_wellington\\_2024-\\_version\\_1.pdf](https://www.pfw.org.nz/site/assets/files/2550/an_urban_eradication_blueprint_-_predator_free_wellington_2024-_version_1.pdf)

Practical Guide to Trapping <https://www.doc.govt.nz/globalassets/documents/conservation/threats-and-impacts/pf2050/trapping-guide-pf2050.pdf>

Predator Free NZ YouTube channel <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC7uWDBdlfTbwHXdJSeB43zA>

Leptospirosis <https://www.worksafe.govt.nz/topic-and-industry/agriculture/working-with-animals/leptospirosis/prevention-and-control-of-leptospirosis/>

### Rules

Under Section 52 and 53 of the Biosecurity Act 1993 no person can sell, propagate, breed, distribute or otherwise spread any pest in a Pest Management Plan, or any unwanted organism. Not complying with Section 52 or 53 is an offence under the Act, and may result in penalties noted in Section 157(1).

### Management Programme

Site-led