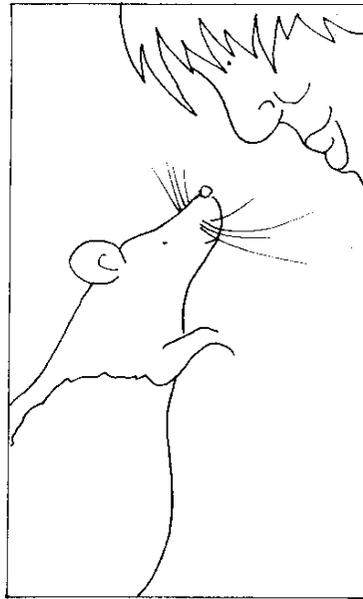


Fancy Rats as Pets

So you're thinking about keeping a Fancy Rat as a pet! Good - they are gentle, trusting, respond well to humans, make excellent companions for young and old alike and seldom, if ever, bite. However, like all living things you must be prepared to spend time in caring for and playing with your rat to keep it happy and healthy. Never, never buy on impulse - should you decide after a few months that you are tired of the little animal you will find that an adult rat is extremely difficult to rehouse. Remember, a Fancy Rat can live from 2-3 years and your pet will rely on you to give it the best life possible during that time.



Housing

First of all you should consider where you are going to keep your pet. As rats are sociable creatures they are best introduced as youngsters and kept in single sex pairs. However, should you decide you have enough time to spend with just one animal it would be happier indoors with you rather than outside in a shed. A shed would be appropriate for a small colony of Fancy Rats kept in a suitably large cage, provided it is not draughty or excessively hot in summer.

Rats are very clean creatures and if their bedding is changed on a regular basis, say once a week, there should be little or no smell. The tank or cage should be fairly large, for example 2' x 1' x 1' and escape proof. An aquarium with a wire lid is nice and easy to clean and will contain the bedding without any mess, but it is a good idea to provide somewhere dark, like a box, for your rat to sleep in. Wooden cages can be used - the inside should be varnished or painted so that urine does not soak in, and cover all wooden edges with wire otherwise you will find that your cage disappears rapidly! Rats do need to gnaw so provide them with a block of

wood or apple branches (untreated of course). They also like tubes to run in, old tissue boxes and anything they can tear up. Bedding must be provided, white wood shavings are good, hay or shredded paper (not newspaper) can be used but avoid fine sawdust as this can cause irritation to your pet's eyes and lungs. In addition, some torn up kitchen towel for the sleeping quarters is appreciated. Avoid locating your tank/cage in direct sunlight and keep it away from draughts.

Feeding

A healthy diet for your pet would be a basic rabbit mix without the growth additives, or hamster mix, each supplemented with dog biscuits. Fresh fruit and vegetables should be given in moderation and your pet will also enjoy the occasional scraps off your plate. Try and avoid anything too greasy or sweet. Most rats will love chicken or other bones. Fresh water must be provided at all times. Rats store their food so be prepared to remove any perishable scraps daily. Feed at the same time each day - your pet will learn very quickly and will be there waiting for you.

Relationships

An important part of a rat's life is play and human contact. Your pet will love coming out of his home to explore yours and once used to you will enjoy being carried around on your shoulder. Male and female rats (bucks and does) make equally good pets. Does are mischievous and active whilst bucks are more content to sit quietly near you. A buck will grow very much bigger than a doe. Care should be taken with other animals - rats will probably kill small rodents if given the chance and cats, rats and some dogs are mortal enemies.

Ailments

A few common ailments which can affect rats are mites, spots, tumours, and snuffles. If you suspect that your pet is not well, do seek your vet's advice without delay. However, rats are generally healthy animals and if looked after properly throughout their life are likely to remain fit and active well into old age.

Shows

Many owners are happy to keep their animals solely as pets. However, others obtain great enjoyment from exhibiting their animals at shows.

The London & Southern Counties Mouse and Rat Club holds shows on the first Saturday of most months of the year at the Fourth Enfield Scout HQ, Gordon Road, Enfield, Middlesex - most of these shows start at 1pm.

For more information

If you would like to know more about Fancy Rats write to

*London & Southern Counties Mouse & Rat Club
153 Kenilworth Crescent
Enfield
Middlesex EN1 3RG
email: lscmrc@miceandrats.com*

or look at our World Wide Web page on www.miceandrats.com

*Other leaflets in this series: Fancy Mice as Pets
Fancy Mice as Pets (in German)*

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*For more information on Fancy Rats and the Club have a look at our
World Wide Web page on www.miceandrats.com*

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