



Paws, Claws & Wings

Physical and Behavioral Rehabilitation for Animals



Rats:

Vital statistics:

Size: 15cm
Longevity: 5 years.
Weight: 550g



Rats are intelligent, affectionate and quiet pets. They become very tame and make wonderful, friendly undemanding pets. Rats are nocturnal so they will be more active at night. Rats have been bred and kept as pets since the early 1900's. Pet rats will behave differently from wild rats as they have been selectively bred to have desirable traits. Rats are very intelligent and can be taught to perform a wide variety of behaviors. Pet rats pose no more of a health risk than pet dogs or cats do. Biting, out of fear or aggression, is unusual in pet rats.



Diet:

High quality rat pellets should make up most of a rats diet with the addition of fresh fruit, vegetables and protein. Small amounts of cooked chicken, cooked egg, apples, sprouts, carrots, cooked pasta, bananas, and broccoli will be greatly appreciated. Never allow your rat to have carbonated drinks, alcohol, avocado, chocolate or caffeine. Fresh,



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clean water must always be available; rats drink more than other rodents so ensure that the water does not run out.



Housing:

A rat cage must be well ventilated. A secure nest for hiding and sleeping is essential, nesting material can be used for bedding. The larger the cage the better. Untreated, dry sawdust is recommended for covering the cage floor. Protection from direct sunlight and draughts is essential. The importance of ventilation is that decomposing droppings and urine give off ammonia. This irritates the respiratory tract, making rats vulnerable to respiratory problems (breathing difficulties). Litter on the cage floor absorbs moisture from droppings, which slows or halts the decomposition process, but some ammonia release is inevitable, even with the best litter. Good ventilation allows ammonia to dissipate in the surrounding air, thus reducing the amount that rats are exposed to in the cage. Never keep intact males and females together as they will breed very quickly and prolifically, rather keep same sex pairs together. Rats are not hardy in cold weather. They must live indoors in a cage. If the cage is sited in a busy part of the home, the rats will enjoy watching their humans passing by, and if part of the cage is at eye-level, you will find that you interact with them more. A cage can be easily converted into a rat adventure playground with a little imaginative use of ropes, ladders, tree branches, shelves, hammocks, and flowerpots attached to the sides. You should try to get a nice tall cage for your rats: they love to climb, and you can maximize the available space by making shelves. Your rat will spend most of its life in its cage, and because they are such intelligent, active animals, it is a shame to keep them in a small space.



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Care:

The main way that a rat exercises is by playing. The best way to rid your rat of excess energy is to build a gymnasium (wheels, balls, ropes, ladders ect) for climbing, hiding and playing on. Hammocks or above ground hideaways are also very popular. Rats are very inquisitive and intelligent so any problem solving toys will make them very happy.

Rats have teeth that continuously grow so gnawing is very important to prevent the teeth from causing medical problems. You don't need to bath a rat as they are relatively clean and do groom themselves. Always handle rats gently, be quiet and calm and move slowly. Don't pick up a pet rat by its tail as you run the risk of injuring the spine.

Rat-proofing requires a little common sense, but need not become a major DIY project.

Many rats will scent-mark 'their' territory with tiny drops of urine. Electrical cords that cannot be kept out of reach of small teeth should be covered with aquarium tubing or hosepipe. Rats will also chew books, clothes, pencils and other items, and are adept at knocking things over. Breakables and valuable possessions should be put out of harm's reach while your rats are out. Make sure that windows and doors are closed, and that there are no possible escape routes. Rats can fit through tiny holes, so you should check for cracks along skirting boards, between floor-boards etc. Some house plants can be poisonous and rats often enjoy climbing plants and digging in plant pots - so it is probably most sensible to keep plants away from your rats.

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