

1 Rats

11 When people think of rats, most of them will say
22 words like, 'Yuck!', or 'Ick!', or they might use phrases like,
31 'Rats are disgusting!', 'Oh, rats are horrible!' They're dirty,
38 filthy!, or 'They make my skin crawl!'

47 Rats do have a history of causing harm, destruction,
57 and even death to humans. Rats have often been portrayed
67 as hideous vermin in stories and movies. When one person
77 thinks badly about another person, he or she might even
83 refer to him as a 'rat'.

92 Some people hate rats. Other people think they're cool.
101 Even though they're small compared to other animals, they
110 have many abilities other animals don't have. What are
121 these abilities? Let me tell you what I have learned about
122 rats.

131 Rats have teeth that never stop growing. And with
140 these teeth, rats have chewing power strong enough to
148 chew through computer cables and even through cement!

157 People should try to keep their distance from rats
166 though, because with their powerful jaws come an extra
175 danger. Rats carry diseases that can kill other animals,
183 including humans. Sometimes tens of thousands of people
196 at one time can be killed by rats who are carrying a disease.

207 How can animals as small as rats get close enough to
217 people and other large animals to hurt them? Rats are
227 nocturnal, which means they are active at night, when most
236 other animals are asleep. Rats have strong night vision
248 which lets them see well in the dark. That means they can
259 usually see better than animals they are sneaking up on, or
262 are stealing from.

272 Rats are also fast runners. Rats can run faster than
282 most people can. You can imagine that this ability would
293 help rats get away from people and other animals that are
296 their natural predators.

305 What do rats eat? Well, rats are omnivorous, which
316 means they will eat plants like corn, and foods that come
325 from plants, like breakfast cereal. But omnivores like rats
334 also eat animals, including pigeons and even other rats!

343 Where do rats live? Rats are found throughout North
353 America. The brown rat originated in Asia. It is believed
363 that these mammals came to the United States and its
370 neighboring countries on ships that sailed from Asia
374 hundreds of years ago.

382 The rat population has increased rapidly. Female rats
395 are able to produce between 100 and 200 young in their
405 lifetimes. Rats live an average of two years. Despite the

418 fact that people have tried to get rid of rats from their cities
429 and farms, rats have used their survival skills to stay alive
433 and grow in number.

443 In cities, rats have been found living in sewer pipes,
452 between walls, in attics, in basements, where boats dock,
463 and in restaurants. Really, in any place where they can find
472 food, and that includes trash dumpsters and dumps, where
483 trash trucks are driven away from cities to bury their trash.

495 Rats that live in cities are smart. While they try to stay
506 hidden from humans to stay alive, they stay close enough to
515 find, and live off, the food humans leave behind.

524 Rats are destructive. It is estimated that rats destroy
534 over \$1,000,000,000 (one billion dollars) worth of food and
544 property every year. Even though people spend lots of time
556 and money trying to get rid of them, rats keep coming back.