



# DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

## INFORMATION SERVICE

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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### RATS MENACE TO HEALTH AND PROPERTY; COST AMERICANS \$189,000,000 YEARLY

Rats have been labeled wildlife enemy Number One and have been charged with being responsible for an estimated annual loss to American citizens of \$189,000,000, according to a recent Fish and Wildlife Service report to Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes.

There are about 123,000,000 rats in the United States, the report estimates, suggesting the popular statement that the rat population approximates the human population.

Because of the close association of rats with man and domestic animals and the life habits of the rodents, rats play an extremely important role in the spread and dissemination of disease.

James Silver, a regional director of the Fish and Wildlife Service and author of the report, pointed out that not only are rats mechanical carriers of bacteria and other parasites, but the animals can transmit a number of their own diseases to man and domestic animals.

Common house rats are known to have been responsible for the spread, at one time or another, of bubonic plague, typhus fever, spirocheatal jaundice, rat-bite fever, food poisoning, tularemia, rabies, trichinosis, and other rat-borne diseases.

Cities have a total estimated rat population of about 29,000,000, or 1 rat to every 2 persons; nonfarm country residences and towns of less than 10,000 population harbor about 34,000,000 rats, or 1 rat to every person; while the total rat population on farms is estimated to be 60,000,000, or more than double the human rural population.

"It is amazing that the rat has been allowed to exist as it has in the United States," Silver declared. "If everyone understood the true status of the rat, how dangerous and how destructive a rodent it is, not a single rat would be allowed to exist in or near a residence or place of business."

Rat-eradication campaigns were suggested for an immediate remedy. But rat-proofing of buildings is necessary if the measures are to remain effective.

#### Rats Destroy Farm Crops

In estimating losses chargeable to rats, consideration must be given not only to the food they consume and waste but also to the other property they destroy and the cost of controlling the rodents.

On farms, rats eat grains, taken from corncribs and granaries, from shocks and sheaves, and from mangers, pig troughs, and poultry yards. They usually eat the germ of the corn kernel and the planted seeds.

Killing baby chicks is a common habit of rats. Even full-grown hens and ducks, baby pigs, and lambs, and large quantities of eggs are commonly destroyed. On one farm, rats killed 188 chickens in 1 night.

Taking all farms into account, experience indicates that the average annual loss is about \$10 a farm, or some \$63,000,000 for all farms in the United States.

#### Cities Pay High Toll to Rats

Towns and cities also suffer from rat infestations. While the rodents usually live on waste foods, they also destroy useful products of high value. To get at food in a city, rats usually gnaw through some container, thereby ruining the entire package though consuming only a little of the food.

In wholesale and retail grocery stores, they gnaw into breakfast foods, crackers, bread, candies, and almost every other food product packaged in cardboard cartons, paper, or wood. In warehouses, feed stores, and mills, sacks of grain and feed and bags of flour are highly subject to rat damage.

Soap, paint, bone, and leather are also destroyed by the voracious rodents. In dry goods and furniture stores, rats figuratively destroy almost their weight in gold by gnawing for nesting material through bolts of silk and into expensive upholstery.

Silver said that a survey in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, in 1928 showed a rat loss of \$100,000, while Dallas, Texas, merchants and residents in 1931 charged up about \$355,000 in losses to rats.

Rats have been known to gnaw on powder puffs, electric wires (causing short circuits and fires), water pipes, telephone wires, and almost every type of commodity available in a city.

"Control with prevention is the only way to reduce the rats and prevent these losses," Silver asserted, "and until the American public realizes that the house rat is one of man's greatest enemies and does something to eradicate the rodent, we can expect an ever-mounting charge to be written against rat losses in cities, towns, and on farms."

The report, a publication of the Department of the Interior, was recently issued as Wildlife Circular 6, entitled "The House Rat," which is available to the public for 5 cents from the Superintendent of Documents, Washington, D. C.