

Roof Rat

Black rat and ship rat are common names for roof rats (*Rattus rattus*). There are three subspecies in the United States (Black rats, Alexandrine rats and Fruit rats) that are generally identified by their fur color. However, the distinction between subspecies is no longer made as crossbreeding has occurred.



Tropical and semitropical climates suit roof rats best. In the United States, roof rats are found along the Pacific Coast, in Hawaii and along the lower half of the East Coast, throughout the Gulf States and south of Arkansas. Occasionally, roof rats are found in other regions, transported there by ships or vehicles, but this is not the norm for roof rats.

Roof rats are slender animals. The tail is longer than the head and body combined. The top and bottom of the tail are the same color; color ranges from black to dark gray. The nose or muzzle is pointed, the eyes are large and the big ears cover the eyes if bent forward.

Reproduction is very similar to the Norway rat. Gestation is 21 to 23 days. Female roof rats bear five to eight pups per litter. The pups are born hairless with their eyes and ears closed. The pups grow hair in a week and their ears open in 14 days. Their eyes open in 9 to 14 days, and the pups begin to explore the nests. Roof rats are weaned between four to five weeks and are sexually mature by three months.

Unlike Norway rats, roof rats prefer to live above ground in trees, vines and other dense vegetation. Roof rats' greater agility and balance enable them to travel utility lines and enter buildings from the roof. Many times roof rats live in the upper stories of buildings, while Norway rats occupy the basement and first floor of the same building.

Roof and Norway rats possess the same senses: poor eyesight, excellent touch, kinesthetic, taste, smell and hearing. Unlike Norway rats, roof rats prefer a variety of fruit and nuts, and occasionally consume ornamentals and native plant materials. Water is generally required every day, but many times the plants roof rats eat provide an adequate amount of moisture.

