

Rat Control

Contributed by Bodger

Bodger talks us through the basics of pest control
Well I'm only really qualified to talk on one subject and as I would like to contribute to this forum , my chosen topic as a one time professional pest controller, has got to be vermin.

In my work I use a veritable arsenal of rodenticides, pesticides, gas and traps against the constant menace of a seemingly ever growing throng of pests.

We, as chicken keepers, are in the front-line when it comes to the number one pest species. The Rat! We owe it to our neighbours, families and to our birds to wage a 365 days of the year, all out war against the rat. I shouldn't have to tell you of the dangers they pose, but if you'd seen some of the sights that I've beheld, then you would understand why I say that even one rat on your place is unacceptable.

Ugh! Rats! I hate them.

The number one tool against rat has got to be poison. A good dog or a trap will catch rats but it will never get them all. The right poison put down in the right way often will.

When I turn out to an infestation I split the job into two definite halves. The first is to get rid of the rats and then just as importantly to try and prevent re-infestation .

Rats need two things to survive – that's food and harbourage. If you can deny one or both of them, then you are on to a winner.

Most of the measures which need to be taken are just sheer common sense but if you are anything like me then you are an expert at putting off the blatantly obvious.

Firstly, do get yourself secure food bins with tight fitting lids. Don't leave food in paper sacks and expect rats and mice to find the paper impenetrable.

Do try to feed your birds the right amount of food so that they clean up pretty quickly. Don't leave great amounts at the bottom of runs especially after the birds have gone to roost.

Now onto harbourage. Harbourage is pest control jargon for somewhere to live. Unless you are fortunate enough to have tailor-made accommodation, the chances are that your bird houses will have inherent design faults that will encourage rats to stay for bed and breakfast. However if you keep your place tidy then you are on the right track. By tidy, I mean get the scrap man in to remove that rusting pile of old junk and put a match to that pile of old wood or rubbish and generally get rid of that rat hotel!

Two things that I would suggest that you try and do whenever possible are to raise your existing sheds up off the floor and try to get 18 -24 inches clearance so that you can see if you have got unwanted visitors beneath your buildings.

Secondly, you can save all the tin sheet you can get and get it nailed flush to the bottom of all your doors and even consider using it to clad vulnerable areas

Now, down to poison. The number one rule with poison is "don't skip". Being 'tight' with your poison could mean that the rats get a sub-lethal dose and encourage resistance or bait shyness.

Warfarin has been on the market for 30-40 years and is known as a first generation anti-coagulant. You can still get it but it really has come to the end of its shelf life. With Warfarin you have to get the rats to eat an amount of poison over a period of time. Warfarin is what is known as a multi dose poison.

In the past ten years we have had the advent of a number of so called second generation anti-coagulants. They still use the same methodology to kill the rats but are single-dose poisons. The rats have to consume a lot less of the poison and only have to have one feed on the bait to get a good kill rate.

Down to practicalities. You need to keep poison down in the form of bait stations all year round and in that way you'll never get a build up of vermin.

Bait stations can take the form of lengths of plastic or clay pipes placed in strategic positions. If you have the pipes about 3 foot long you can spoon the bait into the middle of it so that only rats can get at it.

Rat poison is now also sold in the form of wax blocks. These are excellent, if a bit expensive. They are weather resistant and can be nailed to the sides of sheds on rat runs and are less likely to attract the chickens.

One thing that I would advise against is the use of scatter bags. Although they might appear handy they aren't as good as they are cracked up to be. Rat colonies have a definite hierarchy and the dominant rats often carry the bags away to keep them from their lesser brethren, hide them and forget where they put them so the poison is lost and therefore wasted.

Fenn traps set in the right places and in the right way can be a useful tool in the fight against rats.

They can be set in wooden tunnels like these. This keeps none target species such as cats and dogs safe from them. Rats also love to run through tunnels and the use of a tunnel actually assists in catching the rats as well as being safer. Set you tunnels along wire netting fence margins and along side your chicken sheds.

In the picture you should just about be able to see the single strand of mains electric fence wire that I use around all my pens to stop foxes from digging in .

Here's one I caught earlier. The rat is killed instantly by having its body crushed by the Fenn.

Beat this hamster Manuel !

A genuine 16"

I use similarly made boxes to site my rat poison in around the farm yard. They keep the poison dry and safely out of harms way away from livestock.

Yeah! When it comes to pests I'm a mine of information and could literally go on and on, and if any of you members need advice on rodents or insects etc, then just PM me !