

NORTH OF ENGLAND RAT SOCIETY

Basic rat care



2016

This guide is aimed at covering the basics needed to give your rats a good standard of care in line with NERS ethics. The society, whilst serious about the rat as an exhibition animal, has always maintained a heavy bias towards the rat as a splendid companion animal. This is reflected in our constitution:

- To uphold and encourage the fancy rat as an excellent pet and exhibition animal.
- To safeguard the interests of the fancy rat, and support the rat fancy in general.
- To advocate and champion the highest quality of rat care.
- To advance safe and reputable breeding practices.
- To adopt and promote the NFRS 'standards of excellence', by which fancy rats should be judged.
- To encourage and maintain optimum practice in judging and show management.
- To provide help and support for rat keepers throughout the North of England and surrounding areas.

The NERS has grown and developed since its conception in 2001 and is now an established, thriving club, which has the well-being of rats at the very centre of all that it undertakes.

This guide aims to provide a starting point for owners and prospective owners, and encouragement to learn more and engage in their own research.

Sourcing rats

Rats are available from a number of different sources. However, some options do not place the rats' welfare highly and this can lead to poorly socialised rats who are prone to health and behavioural issues. There are also ethical considerations in terms of the quality of life the rat experiences prior to the point of purchase. As such we recommend all owners to really engage with this side of the process and source their rats from a responsible breeder or established rescue.

It is important to note that the whole spectrum of care and welfare is represented across breeders and rescues, and anyone calling themselves a "breeder" or "rescue" doesn't

automatically make them a good, responsible one! Prospective owners are encouraged to spend time researching, with the view to find someone whose ethics and breeding practices they feel comfortable with. Ask around for other people's experiences; if no one has heard of the person that should also set alarm bells going, as responsible breeders and rescues will make a point of being involved and contribute to local rat clubs and/or the UK fancy as a whole.

Responsible breeders

A responsible breeder will:

- Plan each litter with care and consideration
- Aim to improve the quality of the rats they breed*
- Not breed more kittens than they can properly care for and socialise
- Not breed more kittens than they can find good homes for
- Not home single kittens or let kittens live without same-age company
- Not home kittens before 6 weeks of age (absolute minimum)
- Remain committed to the well-being of each rat they breed for the duration of the rat's life
- Keep their rats in appropriately sized accommodation, provide enrichment, and feed them a healthy varied diet.

**Improvement can be in health, temperament, longevity, and physical features.*

It is up to you to decide what level of ethics you wish to support, as this is a personal decision based on your own priorities. Good rat breeders put a lot of time and effort into breeding and socialising their litters, and will only breed from good quality, healthy, friendly animals. Always ask to handle the rats and ensure they are healthy and happy. Buying an animal from somebody is effectively endorsing their ethics and husbandry, so please do satisfy yourself that you are happy with this person and their breeding practices.

A responsible breeder will want to make sure you are a good home for their future kittens and will stay in touch throughout the

rats' lives, offering support with any problems or questions that you may have, and asking you to keep them informed of how your rats get on. Expect a responsible breeder to ask you lots of questions. If they are happy to home their babies without much consideration of the kind of home you would provide, be wary.

A responsible breeder will also expect and welcome your questions about their practices and their rats. The benefits of building a good relationship with your chosen breeder will also be felt after you take your kittens home, as the breeder will continue to provide advice and support. Getting rats from a breeder is a two-way relationship, ideally one which both parties will find rewarding and important.

Rats from a responsible breeder should be well socialised, and the breeder will actively be working on improving their lines and should have a good understanding of typical problems in their line. The rats should settle in well and generally have minimal temperament issues. Kittens should be sold in same-sex pairs or trios. Please do not expect a responsible breeder to have kittens available immediately, as they do not breed all the time. Many keep waiting lists and you should enquire about kittens in advance of actually wanting to take them home. Waiting times vary but can be anything from a few weeks to several months, especially if you are looking for a particular variety, but also depending on the timing of their litter plans and the number of people already waiting for their kittens.

Established rescue

There are always many rats who end up in rescue, and it is also not uncommon for litters to be born in rescue. Pet shops and 'backyard breeders' are often poor at sexing rats (who can get pregnant from 5-6 weeks old) and many owners give up their rats later in life due to changes in circumstances or loss of interest. If you like the idea of rescuing rats who are in need of a second chance, please consider this option. Although they often have an unknown background, rescue rats can and do make wonderful and rewarding pets, and many kittens who are born in rescue have had the best possible start and are socialised from birth.

Whilst the NERS is not a rescue organisation, we do actively support responsible rat rescue throughout the UK. Some of our members are involved in rescue themselves and we will often know of rescue rats available in the North of England and further afield.

Rescue rats can be young or old. Kittens with a rescue background are often not as large and physically robust as those from a reputable breeder. Most rescue rats don't have specific health or temperament issues, although some (particularly those kept alone for a long time) may come with existing issues which need your help to resolve or manage. Going to an established rat rescue or a multispecies rescue with a good reputation for rat care and knowledge should help make sure you find rats who are suitable to you as an owner.

There are a number of places where rescue rats are advertised, as well as coming up on sites like Gumtree and Preloved; much less is generally known about these rats so it can be riskier in terms of their temperament and health. However, if you need rats urgently - such as for company for a lone rat - this is often the best option, otherwise seek out an established rescue. A good place to start is Rat Rescue Network UK (Facebook group).

What about pet shops?

Many people do not realise that rats are bred responsibly by breeders, and automatically head for the nearest pet shop to supply their new kittens. Rats from this source have mostly been bred in large rodent farms where breeding is a commercial venture, and no consideration is given to long-term health and temperament, nor is ongoing work possible to improve the rats they breed due to the lack of information on the rats they send out.

People breed rats for all sorts of reasons, and some breeders feel comfortable selling the surplus to the pet trade; indeed some breeders keep, breed and sell their rats in a manner little different from pet shops. The NERS does not support this as responsible breeding (see definition above). Buying from a pet shop is also not the same as rescuing, as the pet shop only cares about whether rats are selling well - if they are, they will be

simply be encouraged to sell more, and the problem is perpetuated. For more information about buying rats from pet shops, which would also apply to some breeders, please read this article: www.neratsociety.co.uk/articles/petshops.shtml

What rats?

Once you have decided where to get your rats, there are a number of other choices to make.

How many?

Rats should always be kept in at least pairs, and a larger group is often better for them - rats are highly social animals and need the company of other rats to live happily and healthily. Even if a human is able to spend all their waking hours with a rat (which most people aren't), the rat would still find itself alone for a large proportion of its life, and crucially, be unable to carry out all of the social behaviours involved in being a rat. A lonely rat will often relate eagerly to its humans because of its need for company, rather than because it is a well-adjusted rat who is relating out of 'friendliness'. Many solitary rats also become withdrawn, lacking in confidence and don't wish to engage with their humans, and visibly flourish once they are able to become integrated into a group. Any caring human who has ever watched a group of rats together for more than a minute or two, will quickly realise why rats need the company of their own species. Their interactions are complex and more or less constant, and rats should not be deprived of this. We can never replace a same-species cage mate and rats that have been kept alone often go on to have social and behavioural issues.

It is traditional for many people to choose to begin with a pair of rats. There are also good arguments for considering a group of 3 or 4, rather than a pair. Not only is this a closer model to the natural groupings of wild rats, but rats - like humans - do not find all other members of their species universally agreeable, so a small group of rats rather than a pair gives each rat a number of social relationships. Life span in rats is quite variable, so one rat of a pair is very likely to find themselves alone at some point, so if you are resolved to only keep a pair you need to consider this in advance rather than deal with the inevitable as it happens (the

options would be to rehome the remaining rat, or to introduce them to an adult rat or two babies).

The amount of work needed to care for 3 or 4 rats (in one cage) is very similar to that needed to care for a pair. The benefits of well-adjusted and contented rats will also spill over in their interactions with you as their human. Many people begin with a pair and then add in another pair of kittens when the first pair is perhaps around 9-12 months old. This approach sets up a rolling group which helps minimise the risk of a lone rat. It also has its benefits in that the groups will not all be the same age, which can be particularly helpful in terms of reaching old age (and dealing with illness and death) at different times. Also, groups with a mix of ages mimic natural behaviour more closely. The only 'rule' when adding further rats to an established group is to not ever add only one baby to a group of adults. Up until about 14 weeks of age, kittens should be within 3 weeks of each other (at most), as young rats have unique behaviours and need the company of other youngsters for their social development and to engage in learning behaviours such as mock fighting.

What sex?

Both bucks (male rats) and does (female rats) make excellent pets. In general bucks may be slightly calmer and need their humans a little more, whereas does are generally more acrobatic and independent; however, this varies a lot with the rats' individual personality. If you are getting rats from a breeder, aim to meet both the bucks and does in their line as this can give you an indication of the relative temperaments.

As a very general rule of thumb, adult bucks tend to weigh around 450-750g and adult does around 200-550g, depending on origin and line. The average life span for rats in the UK is approximately 24 months.

In terms of health, does are more prone to mammary tumours and neurological issues, and bucks more prone to kidney, heart and hind leg degeneration. Generally speaking does live a little longer but cost more in vet bills, although this varies hugely by rat. It is important not to ever mix the sexes unless one or both sex is neutered, as rats reproduce very efficiently and are able

to do so from 6 weeks old.

What variety?

All pet rats belong to a single species; the Norway rat (*Rattus norvegicus*) and there aren't different breeds of rat. However, there are lots of lovely varieties – different colours, fur types, markings, ear positions and so on. Everyone's preference will vary, but all rats regardless of variety make equally good pets and there is no "friendlier" variety. It is recommended to speak to an experienced breeder to find out more about particular varieties you are interested in; most responsible breeders choose to focus their work on a small number of varieties.

Caring for your rats

Rats are highly social, affectionate pets who often bond to their human companions in a similar way to dogs, and become very attached to their owners. They are intelligent, playful little creatures who can learn a range of tricks and will keep you entertained as well as challenged! However, compared to other small rodent species, rats are fairly high maintenance and although cheap to buy, they are certainly not cheap to keep. Because they are so intelligent, they require considerable attention, daily freerange time and a stimulating, enriched environment that allows them to express natural behaviours. Therefore, while rats are extremely rewarding pets who will repay any attention and affection you give them many times over, they require commitment and are not suitable for everyone. Your rats are entirely reliant on you for all aspects of their welfare, so it is important to be a responsible owner to your pets.

Caging

Rats should be kept in large housing which offers space of at least 2 cubic foot per rat, and should be big enough for 4 rats at a minimum (even for a pair or trio). Does and bucks need equally big cages despite the difference in size. Avoid tanks and other options where ventilation and climbing opportunity is poor. A large hutch with an open mesh front is suitable, with some adaption to encourage climbing and enrichment and prevent

chewing, but for most owners a barred wire cage is the most straightforward option. Even with daily freerange, many rats spend 22+ hours a day in their cage so it is very important that it is as large and interesting as possible.

Generally the cage should have coated bars, good access (at least a door 2 hands can fit through on the front and top) and a deep tray to enable a deep layer of substrate. Bar spacing can be up to about 1.6 cm for kittens and does, and up to 2.5 cm for large adult bucks. Some examples of good cages are:

- For 4 rats or less: Ferplast Furet Plus, Savic Freddy 2, Mamble 100, Coco, Hamberley, Savic Zeno 2.
- Up to 6 rats: Liberta Abode, Jenny KD, Savic Freddy Max, Liberta Nevada, Ferplast Furet XL.
- Up to 10 rats: Savic Zeno 3 Empire, 2 stacked Furet Plus.
- Even bigger: Savic Royal Suite, Liberta Explorer, Savic Royal Suite XL, Furet Tower, Liberta Tower.

There is a useful cage space calculator where you can put in measurements to find out whether the cage meets the minimum recommendation and how many rats the cage is suitable for:

www.fancyratsforum.co.uk/calculator/cagecalc.html

Before you purchase a cage, it is worth asking your chosen breeder or rescue for recommendations; they may know of suitable second hand options, and they may also have their own requirement for minimum cage size.

Habitat

Rats should be kept on an absorbent, low-dust, low-odour substrate (floor covering). Suitable options are chopped cardboard (e.g. Finacard, Greenmile, Ecobed), hemp (e.g. Aubiose), paper bedding (e.g. Fitch), or a good quality heat treated and dust extracted wood shaving intended for horses (e.g. Bedmax, Megaspread). 100% paper based litter (e.g. Back to Nature) is safe for rats but a bit too absorbent to use as the main substrate so if you want to use this, it is best to mix it with chopped card or hemp, or to use in the litter tray. Avoid low quality wood shavings sold in pet shops, sawdust, any scented beddings, and clay- or wood-based cat litter. Dust extracted

hay can be nice for the rats to play in but should be used as an addition to more absorbent substrate. Fleece can be used to cover the floor but as rats love to dig and forage, a large digging box should always be provided.

Fresh water should always be available in the rats' cage, ideally from more than one source (e.g. 2 bottles, or a bowl and a bottle) so the rats aren't left without water in the case of a malfunctioning or chewed bottle. Most rats really enjoy an open water source such as a bowl for playing and washing as well as drinking. Food bowls however are not necessary and most rats do much better with scatter feeding (where their food is scattered around the cage) as this provides enrichment and enjoyment and encourages natural behaviours.

When setting up the rats' cage, care should be taken to allow them to exhibit all their natural behaviours, such as digging, foraging, climbing, balancing, running, jumping, sleeping, nesting, chewing, problem solving, etc. There are many options of toys and accessories to allow these to take place, and there is a very useful article on active cage layouts here: www.neratsociety.co.uk/articles/ratseyeview.shtml

Socialising, handling and play

Rats should receive human attention daily. Handling them and checking them over for health issues is also important to their long term health and socialisation. Rats love coming out of their cage to play and explore their environment so they should get regular time out of the cage to play, either in a rat-proofed freerange area or room, or on the sofa / bed etc. with you; ideally for 1 hour or more every day. They are intelligent and agile so should not be let out without close supervision. It is a good idea to protect soft furnishings with a large throw or bedspread, as both sexes scent mark (little drops of urine) and they also enjoy chewing! If you need to block off part of a room, a foldable barrier can be made out of tall corrugated plastic sheeting.

Rats should never be allowed to mix with other species and their cage needs to be situated safely away from any other pets in the home.

New rats will require time to settle in and get to know you before being fully comfortable. This is especially true of babies and rescue rats from less socialised backgrounds, although any kittens who are away from their home for the first time will need a period of adjustment and getting to know you. Allowing the rats time overnight to settle into their new cage can be useful (unless they are very bold and relaxed and begging to come out) but from then on it is best to make the first move and confidently pick up and interact with the rats, ignoring any protest or upset (as reacting to this can reinforce their apprehension). If you handle your rats as much as possible; whether they seem to like it or not at first, they will soon enjoy your company. It can be a good idea to let them ride on your shoulders, in a hooded jumper or a bonding pouch.

In the first couple of weeks it is also worth removing any hiding places or enclosed nests in the cage to help them acclimatise to their new home without hiding away. The more attention you give your new rats when you first get them home, the sooner they will get used to your voice and smell and begin to trust you. For more handling and socialisation tips, including hands-on demonstrations, speak to an experienced rat owner or breeder.

Feeding

Rats are broad-spectrum opportunistic omnivores who thrive on a wide variety of foods and derive great pleasure from eating. They should be given a varied and balanced diet which meets their nutritional needs at their current age. Generally speaking adult rats should be fed on foods containing no more than 12-14% protein and 4-5% fat. Younger rats need more protein, which can be provided via additional wet meals as needed, and older rats may need less protein, highly processed elements, lower wheat etc. as they are prone to kidney degeneration.

Commercial mixes

These are generally of poor quality and nutritional balance, and/or contain unsuitable ingredients. The online shop RatRations offer a range of good quality mixes, although these

need some supplements to bring them into balance. Some rabbit feeds (eg. Harrison's Banana Brunch, Mr Johnsons Special Rabbit) are closer to rats' nutritional requirements but will need additional bits added or be used as a base for a homemade mix.

Homemade mix

This is generally one of the best options available in the UK; with sites like RatRations and local shops selling a large amount of ingredients, it is easy to construct a varied and nutritionally sound mix. Care should be taken to ensure it is balanced; generally a Shunamite style mix is the best option to ensure your rats get what they need. It is not adequate to stick random things together that the rats might like, as this can lead to dietary imbalance and long term damage to health.

The Shunamite diet was developed by Alison Campbell and is detailed in her book 'The Scuttling Gourmet'. It is a method of feeding (not a prescriptive recipe) which works according to the following principles:

- Suitable base food (50-60%)
- Source of protein (5-10%)
- Carefully chosen low-sugar/low-salt human cereal (≈20%)
- Seeds, vegetables and herbs (10-15%)

If you don't want to mix your own food, the 'complete' mixes from RatRations are high quality and based on Shunamite feeding principles, but as these mixes are entirely straight-based and not fortified, it is necessary to supplement calcium and vitamin D two or three times a week (use the Daily Rat 3 supplement and Dr Squiggles Daily Essentials) to meet the rats' nutritional requirements.

Lab block or pelleted/nugget diets

These should be avoided as they are very boring for such an intelligent animal, and a long way from the scavenged range rats have evolved to eat. Good quality nuggets can be fed as part of a grain based mix; however, the majority sold in the UK contain poor quality ingredients.

General feeding principles

Rats benefit from being fed regular vegetables and fruit. Generally, dark green leafy veg (kale, broccoli etc) and colourful veg such as peppers and carrots should be the main ones fed. Fruit should be kept minimal due to the sugar content, although some berries are relatively low sugar and have good health benefits. Care should be taken before introducing or increasing the amount of veg as otherwise it may cause stomach upsets.

Generally unhealthy, salty or fatty foods should be avoided. Citrus and mango should be avoided for male rats only. There is a list of safe veg and fruits available here:

www.fancyratsforum.co.uk/viewtopic.php?f=14&t=318

Take care not to overfeed your rats, as obesity can shorten their lives and will often lead to avoidable health problems, such as increase the risk of mammary tumours.

Feeding is an enormous area and it is recommended that you ask your chosen breeder or rescue for further recommendations and more information. It is also a good idea to purchase 'The Scuttling Gourmet' which is a veritable bible on all aspects of rat nutrition and feeding. It contains lots of information on different ingredients and nutritional content, feeding principles on how to meet your rats' nutritional requirements at different stages of life and health, weight management, feeding for fitness and to improve condition, as well as many tasty recipes.

Health

Rats do sadly get ill and are generally not very robust compared to many other small rodent species. They are prone to a number of issues and with such short lives it is common to see them crop up fairly regularly. If you think your rat is unwell, they should be seen by a vet as soon as possible, no matter how minor it may seem, as delays can lead to more serious problems.

Symptoms of a rat being unwell include: fluffed up (staring) coat, lots of red staining (porphyrin) around nose/eyes/fur, side sucking or heavy/noisy breathing, discharge or blood tinted

urine, lethargy or weakness, loss of weight and condition. There are many more symptoms but those are the major common ones and should be checked by a vet. Below are some of the most common issues we see in rats.

Respiratory issues: Most often from a bacterial infection (such as mycoplasma or pasteurella) but can also be from a virus, tumour, abscessing of the lungs, etc. Treatment is normally antibiotics but for severe respiratory symptoms (such as gasping or significant breathing distress), combining two antibiotics or one with a steroid, is often required. The best choice antibiotic depends on the bacteria involved and the age of the rat, but due to the often fast progression of respiratory illness, it is not practical to do a culture prior to treatment.

Kidney issues: Common in ageing rats especially bucks; typically seen as a gradual loss of muscle and weight (sometimes with associated hind leg degeneration), drinking and sometimes urinating more. Can be confirmed using a urine dipstick to check for protein levels. Treatment is via a kidney friendly diet, phosphate binders and ace inhibitors.

Heart issues: Also common in older rats; can generally be seen via lethargy, brief bursts of energy followed by exhaustion and sometimes respiratory symptoms; also going off handling and/or leaning up or backwards when handled to get as much air into the lungs as possible. Diagnosis and treatment is via ACE inhibitors and diuretic; if they respond in 3-5 days then continue with the medication.

Tumours: Most tumours on rats are benign and mostly external lumps such as mammary or fatty lumps that sit just below or inside the skin layer. Usually easily removable via surgery which is normally the best course of action unless the rat is high risk. More common in does over 18 months and as mammary lumps (which bucks can also get) are hormonally driven, if a doe is young and fit it can be worth spaying at the same time.

Neurological issues: Strokes or brain tumours such as pituitary tumours (also ear infections which are not neurological but can present in a similar way). Typically seen as behavioural changes, weakness or circling when walking, head tilt, confusion and lack

of coordination, poor grip. If a head tilt and circling is spotted it is likely to be an ear infection (particularly in a young rat) in which case antibiotics and a steroid is the best option. Strokes and PTs or other brain tumours are best treated immediately with steroids. Strokes can be recovered from (although can reoccur) whereas brain tumours are degenerative and best managed with steroids and possibly cabergoline (which can help with hormonally driven PTs), to give a good quality of life for as long as possible before putting to sleep.

Hind Leg Degeneration (HLD): Particularly common in older bucks; the hind legs gradually get weaker until they have minimal to no strength. Can be linked to kidney degeneration so do a urine test. In a small number of cases it may be arthritic based (stiff jerky movement rather than floppiness) in which case an anti-inflammatory such as Metacam is a good idea. Generally best managed via diet, gentle exercise and adapted cage set-up.

Abscesses: Particularly common in bucks; a hard lump which usually inflates within the skin layer (though can be glandular based or deeper). Often associated with bite wounds, scratches or surgical sites, but there may not be a visible wound on the surface. Usually come to a head (a scab forms) before bursting and emptying out. Applying a warm compress to the abscess site and flushing out the pus can promote faster healing. Antibiotics are generally only necessary for reoccurring or stubborn ones, or facial abscesses, in which case co-amoxicillin and metronidazole are amongst the best.

Infection control and quarantine

One major factor to be aware of in terms of rat health is the need to quarantine rats from high risk backgrounds. This is due to the risk of the new rats carrying viruses or parasites which could be passed to your existing rats (or other people's rats via a show or meet), causing illness and even death. If you plan to get rats from any of the sources below, you should ideally keep them in a separate airspace (e.g. different house / building) to your existing rats. If this is not an option then another room (separated by 2 doors to act as an airlock) and changing top

layers / washing hands between visits is better than nothing.

High risk environments are: Pet shops; breeders or rescues who do not quarantine, or have lots of rats coming in and out, or from unknown / untrustworthy backgrounds. Generally it is worth asking anyone you get rats from if they have had contact with other rats in the past 3 weeks and if so if they have quarantined. Rat shows with quarantine rules in place and breeders who have taken in rats from other routinely quarantining breeders are generally medium risk.

If you are planning to attend a NERS show with your rats, it is very important that you follow our infection control rules.

Please do not bring your rats if you have had - or had contact with -

- Brought in any new rats over the past 2 weeks;
- Any acute (new) infection related illness or unexpected deaths in the past 2 weeks;
- Been to any other shows or gatherings of rats in the past 2 weeks;
- Any rat related contact with rats of unknown background (eg rescue centre, pet shop) in the past 2 weeks;
- A virus within a small group of rats within the past 4 weeks;
- A virus within a group of 15 or more rats, or when raising a litter within the past 8 weeks.

Individual circumstances will be considered, so if you are unsure whether or not you can attend with your rats please contact the show secretary. Help us to keep your rats safe!

* The table opposite lists members of the NERS who also breed rats. We provide this information to help you to locate a responsible breeder in your area. **Please note that inclusion on the list does not constitute a recommendation or endorsement by the society.**

List of NERS member breeders *

Rattery name and website	Breeder's name and location
Black Magic Rattery blondevixenrat@yahoo.co.uk	Victoria Robinson Hyde, Cheshire
Eximius Rats www.eximius-rats.co.uk	Lloyd Allington Lincon, Lincolnshire
Gallifrey Rattery www.gallifreyrattery.com	Cat Mace Morley, West Yorkshire
Hawthorn Stud http://hawthorn.ratvarieties.com	toyah Leitch Glasgow, Scotland
Honeyduke Rats www.honeydukerats.weebly.com	Stacey Cochrane Preston, Lancashire
Isamu Rattery www.isamurats.co.uk	Jemma Fettes Leyland, Lancashire
Lilliput Stud www.lilliputrattery.co.uk	Lilly Hoyland Sheffield, South Yorkshire
Lovecraft Stud www.lovecraftfrats.co.uk	Lisa Maurin Lancaster, Lancashire
Renegade Rats www.facebook.com/Ren.Rattery	Hannah Field Sheffield, South Yorkshire
Shayilen Rattery www.facebook.com/Shayilen-Rattery	Ayla Stryder Bathgate, West Lothian
Shunamite Stud www.shunamiterats.co.uk	Alison Campbell Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Tyne & Wear
Skatta Rat Stud www.skattarat.co.uk	Coleen Gruber Grimsby, Lincolnshire
Stovokor Rattery www.stovokor.co.uk	Laura Holt Wigan, Lancashire
Tenebrae Stud douglas.connor@gmail.com	Doug Connor Banbury, Oxfordshire
Zephyr Stud www.zephyrrats.co.uk	Mary Giles Meldreth, Cambridgeshire

Useful links for further information

General care and advice

www.neratsociety.co.uk – Useful guides and information as well as a place to join the club, its forum and Facebook group for more information and support. A great way of getting involved in the fancy and getting to know other rat owners in your local area!

www.fancyratsforum.co.uk – UK based forum with lots of useful guides, information and historic posts, as well as the ability to post and ask questions to experienced rat owners.

Health

www.ratguide.org – A detailed site full of information on rat health and medications. Useful to print out and take along to the vets.

Behaviour

www.ratbehavior.org – A site full of information drawn from scientific studies on rats behaviour, also includes some useful information on health, genetics and similar.

www.isamurats.co.uk – Contains guides to introduction techniques and rat behaviour as well as other general information such as feeding, enrichment and habitat.

Varieties and breeding

www.ratvarieties.com – A site containing the names, descriptions and photos of pretty much all rat varieties that are standardised along with some of the alternative names around the world.

www.nfrs.org – The National Fancy Rat Society, contains information on breeding and the varieties standards as well as some info on health and of course shows around the country.

www.ratz.co.uk – Contains good guides to starting out breeding and selecting rats as well as inbreeding, also contains a good range of care data though some may be a little out of date. It

also contains an excellent article as to why pet shops should be avoided for sourcing rats.

Rescue

www.facebook.com/groups/RRNUK – Rat Rescue Network UK is a Facebook group where rescue rats across the country are advertised.

Feeding

www.shunamiterats.co.uk/the-scuttling-gourmet/ – Home of 'The Scuttling Gourmet'! UK authority on all aspects of rat nutrition and feeding.

www.thehayexperts.co.uk – Lovely 'Taster Selection Sample Pack' with 6 different hays and grasses which come in paper bags for added enrichment.

Online shops

www.ratratations.co.uk – A site selling lots of food, bedding, accessories, supplements, their own ready-made mixes, etc.

www.cosybedsandburrows.com – A regular at NERS shows, they sell a large range of hammocks and other accessories.

www.ratwarehouse.co.uk – This site sells a nice range of food, health items and accessories.

www.bettysbeds.com – Hammocks.

www.fuzzbutt.co.uk – Hammocks.

www.ratsratsrats.co.uk – For rat owners!

About this publication: North of England Rat Society

We hope this brief guide has been a useful read and a helpful starting point for you. If you decide to join the NERS and help us to enjoy and promote rats as wonderful pets, please fill out the application form on our website (www.neratsociety.co.uk/forms/membership.shtml) or email the Membership Secretary on membership@neratsociety.co.uk

As of 2016, our membership rates are £9 per year for new members (£7 renewal) and £12 for a family membership (£10 renewal). Benefits of membership include:

- NERS Joining pack (welcome letter, complimentary copy of Rattitude, show rules and varieties booklet and a little something for your ratties too)
- Rattitude (quarterly colour magazine with a wide range of informative articles as well as society news and information)
- Easy access to member breeders
- Support and advice via the forum and the Facebook group (both members-only)
- Eligibility to apply for the NERS Longevity award scheme
- Reduced show entry rates
- Loan service (items such as live/humane rat trap, books)
- Web directory for members' rat related websites
- Annual Report
- Right to a voice and a vote (for members aged 16 and over) on how the society evolves.

If you have any questions or feedback, please contact us via our website:

www.neratsociety.co.uk

