



Norway rat

Rattus norvegicus

Kingdom: Animalia
Division/Phylum: Chordata - vertebrates
Class: Mammalia
Order: Rodentia
Family: Muridae

Features

Also known as “brown rat” because of its color, the Norway rat is large for a rat – 12 to 19 inches long, including a five- to nine-inch tail. It has a salt-and-pepper look with brown, black, and gold hairs. There are darker hairs down the middle of the back. The belly is gray or cream and the feet are white. The ringed, scaly, one-colored tail is nearly hairless.

Natural History

The Norway rat lives in buildings, barns, houses, dumps, storm sewers, and other areas associated with humans - wherever food and shelter are available. It eats most anything. It will eat food intended for human use and can contaminate food supplies. This rat will carry food to its nest instead of eating it where the food is found. It usually is associated with poor sanitary conditions and livestock areas. The Norway rat is known to spread diseases. It primarily is nocturnal. It is a good climber. It produces some sounds. Mating may occur at any time throughout the year. The average

litter size is seven. Young are born helpless but develop rapidly and are able to live on their own after one month. Females begin reproducing at the age of three months. If conditions are favorable, a female may reproduce once per month. The average life span of the Norway rat is about 1 1/2 years. The Norway rat was introduced to the United States from Europe.

Habitats

Mississippi River; Missouri River; interior rivers and streams; natural lakes and prairie marshes; wet prairies and fens

Iowa Status

common; exotic

Iowa Range

statewide

Bibliography

Iowa Department of Natural Resources. 2001. *Biodiversity of Iowa: Aquatic Habitats* CD-ROM.