



PHOTOS: iStock/ Carlos Aranguiz/icefront

DIRTY RAT

Despised introduced pest or native rodent?

LET us start by saying this - we understand that rats and mice, when well looked after, can make wonderful pets.

We appreciate that pet rats are smart, friendly, easy to train and are no more of a health risk to humans than cats or dogs.

Pet rats, again if well cared for by their owners, are actually quite good at grooming and not dirty at all.

Of course wild rats and mice don't have such a good reputation.

Wild rats and their fleas are generally blamed for spreading the Black Death in Europe in the 14th Century, although some

scientists now believe the rapid spread of bubonic plague had more to do with human parasites - fleas and lice that were living on humans and their clothes.

Certainly it had more to do with dirty humans than dirty rats.

People were pretty gross back in the 14th Century.

They didn't wash very often, and sewage flowed down streets in open drains - can you imagine the smell?

Anyway, living conditions were often cramped and dirty, and humans were living in close contact with rats.

It is true though that wild rats and mice do spread disease, and

when introduced into an environment where they previously did not exist, they can wreak havoc.

They have caused the extinction of many species of wildlife, particularly on islands where animals have not previously been threatened by native predators.

There are three introduced species of rodents in Tasmania: the black rat, *Rattus rattus*; the brown rat, *Rattus norvegicus*; and the house mouse, *Mus musculus*.

You are more likely to see a house mouse or a brown rat in urban areas, while black rats can

be found in rural areas and bushland.

All three have probably been around since Europeans first arrived in Tasmania.

In fact, all three have spread throughout the world on ships.

Black rats - also known as 'ship rats' - are great stowaways.

If you are a regular reader of *The Wonder Weekly* you might remember the articles which have talked about the damage caused by rats and mice on Tasmanian islands, including Macquarie Island, and the efforts to eradicate them.

But did you know Tasmania also has five

species of native rodents?

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Can you tell a native from a pest rodent?

FROM PAGE 1

Tasmania's five native rodents are the water rat, long-tailed mouse, New Holland mouse, broad-toothed rat and swamp rat.

That is as much as we are going to tell you about them, because your challenge is to find out more about our five native rodents.

Think about details such as their scientific name, habitat, diet and behaviours.

Most importantly, research the distinguishing features of each species, such as their size (average weight when fully grown), colouring, tail, eyes and ears.

The Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania is a good place to start: nre.tas.gov.au/wildlife-management/fauna-of-tasmania/mammals/rats-and-mice

We have provided a spreadsheet on page 3 of today's edition of *The Wonder Weekly* to assist this process.

Once complete, it will help you identify one species of rodent from another.

This is important because black rats have invaded native forests in Tasmania and compete with native species, particularly the swamp rat.

While the New Holland Mouse is listed as endangered and is very similar in size and appearance to the house mouse.

Our native rodents need our help.

Children's University Tasmania members can earn hours in their passports for this challenge at the discretion of school/ hub coordinators.



Video making activity

IF you enjoy making videos, a National Science Week (August 13-21) competition might be for you.

The Australian Meteorological and Oceanographic Society (AMOS) and the Australian Marine Sciences Association (AMSA) are calling for five minute videos which reveal a local impact climate change is having or will have, and your idea(s) on how we can adapt, or mitigate, this impact.

A panel of judges will select the top two films from each section based on their ability to inform and engage a broad audience and the originality and feasibility of the idea(s) presented.

These films will receive a prize.

The winning videos in each section - including primary school and secondary schools sections - will be promoted during National Science Week with a formal screening and seminar-panel discussion organised by TasAMSA and AMOS as part of the University of Tasmania's Winter Lecture Series.

All eligible videos will be maintained as part of the AMSA and AMOS educational video collection.

Find out more here: climatescienceinaction.com

Birds of prey

WORDSEARCH

DID YOU KNOW? Bald eagles live in North America. They have 7000 feathers, which protect them from the heat, the cold and the rain. Bald eagle feathers interlock in several layers.

MYSTERY WORD: BALD EAGLE

G	Y	R	F	A	L	C	O	N	L	E
V	A	I	N	R	O	F	I	L	A	C
N	D	E	R	R	A	B	W	G		
B	E	B	I	R	D	D	E	A	O	
A	R	A	C	A	R	A	C			
P	E	R	E	G	R	I	N	E		
B	A	T	E	L	E	U	R			
S	H	A	W	K	B	A	L			

The words on the list which are in capital letters are hidden somewhere in this puzzle. Find and circle them. When you have found all the words the letters you have left will give you the answer to this question . . . Which bird of prey is the national symbol of the United States of America? The solution is above.

BARRED owl	E	G	O	S	H	A	W	K	B	A	L
BATELEUR eagle	R	O	S	B	A	T	E	L	E	U	R
brown GOSHAWK	U	L	P	E	R	E	G	R	I	N	E
CALIFORNIA condor	T	D	R	A	R	A	C	A	R	A	C
CARACARA	L	E	E	B	I	R	D	D	E	A	O
GOLDEN eagle	U	N	Y	D	E	R	R	A	B	W	G
GYRFALCON	V	A	I	N	R	O	F	I	L	A	C
northern HARRIER	G	Y	R	F	A	L	C	O	N	L	E
OSPREY											
PEREGRINE falcon											
secretary BIRD											
snowy OWL											
turkey VULTURE											

Tasmanian Native Rodent Identifying Chart

Common name	Water rat	Long-tailed mouse	New Holland mouse	Broad-toothed rat	Swamp rat
Scientific name	<i>Hydromys chrysogaster</i>				
Habitat					
Diet					
Behaviours					
Size (average adult)					
Colouring					
Other features:					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tail • Eyes • Ears • Others 					