

RAT: A MENACE TO MAN

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The Nigeria Standard, Saturday, September 21, 1991**

Whether one lives in a bungalow or a multi-storey high rise structure he/she is prone to mavericism of rats. Rats are mammals that have good sense of smell, their urine and genital secretions enable their members to trail them into buildings and other places such as these. Still on their morphological features, rats are active and possess acute sense of hearing. They are able to live successfully on man's habitations by feeding on his stored products. Their gestation period lasts for less than a month (between 20-22 days) which makes them prolific just like pigs. Research work carried out by some mammalogists indicated that they could produced thirty-four times in a year.

Public Health Importance of Rats

It is believed that with the exception of man, rats and mice have been most successful and far-out-numbered other mammals. Invading his place of habitations therefore, has brought rats into close contact with man resulting in rodent-borne diseases. Rodent-borne diseases are all zoonoses.

According to WHO (1959) they are diseases and infections whose agents are naturally transmitted between vertebrate animals and man. Organisms that could be transmitted are spirochaetes, nematodes, viruses, bacteria are *Salmonella* which are responsible for food poisoning i.e. salmonellosis, symptoms in man include nausea, fever vomiting and abdominal pains. This bacterium is transmitted as a result of rats faecal droppings and urine on food.

Another form of disease is leptospirosis which is due to spirochaetes that inhabit the kidney of rats. Dissemination of these organisms is achieved through the urine. Man acquires these parasites when he comes in contact with moist soil and also when infected rats are carelessly handled. Symptoms may include fever, vomiting and body pains.

The possible recommendations will be as outlined below:

- (i) Use of rat poisons that will not cause any harm to man. Precautionary measures should be taken in applying rat poisons at suspected sites, since some rat habitates are inaccessible and such place that are far from the reach of children.

- (ii) Cleaning of bookshelves, book-bindings and removing faeces of rats (bearing in mind its implications).
- (iii) Food commodities in stores such as maize flour, Accha, rice and millet should be well covered so as to avoid being damaged by rats.
- (iv) The use of traps with or without baits helps in reducing rat numbers. Dead rats should be removed as soon as possible. Baits that are attractable to rats include dried fish, smoked fish, groundnuts cakes and peanuts. In encouraging trapping activity therefore, fresh baits should be replaced as soon as other baits dry up.
- (v) Constant cleaning of cushions is required, this helps to remove rat droppings and urine.