

# THE EXHIBITION MOUSE

## He wants to help to save the 'aristocrats of the Fancy'

### out of the postbag

EARLY in September 1970, Tim Heath gave me four Sable does. Personal delivery to my door, too, as he is in digs in Notting Hill and, after eating our week's supply of biscuits, he left me with the words 'Get a Red buck from Jack Hartley or someone.'

So there I was, a novice with four Sable does.

I have tried most of the popular strains, and failed, or given up, or both, but had fallen in love with the delightful coats of the Sables some three months earlier.

Now, in the middle of January, I have eight Sable does and a buck that needs a body building course and many many lessons from an amorous doe.

Anyway, I am determined not to give up, and perhaps, if someone would like to correspond with me, we could do our thing in saving, to quote Angus Ridley (December 17), the 'aristocrats of the Fancy.'

I think I am probably the only one in the Fancy who has the caging system I operate, too. My pens are clear Perspex fish-tanks, large enough for a trio, or a doe and litter.

They are durable, tough and hygienic. Each of these slides neatly into a tiered shelving unit, four to a shelf. Each shelf is made of a framework and the underside of that frame covered in wire gauze.

The tanks taper out towards the top, therefore there is maximum air intake, the air circulating through each shelf underneath each cage, through the mesh to the cage below.

No tops or lids are required and to feed it is necessary only to slide the cage out a few inches, drop in food, slide cage back. To feed sixty mice and a family of gerbils takes six minutes. This leaves far more time to sit and study them, without having to disturb them at all.

As there is a heater beneath the unit, the does clear away all nest material from beneath their litter, and to inspect them, I just lift the tank and look underneath.

I clean out two or three times a week and use wood shavings (fresh from the undertaker). The tanks need a wash about every two months. They are kept indoors, and are disease free! JON STRUTT, Flat 3, 245 Willerden Lane, London NW2.

### Get busy on the Tricolour—quickly

DURING the past year several articles have appeared in FUR AND FEATHER on various matters upon which I offer my personal point of view on some of them.

Of course the most significant has been the rise in rail charges—something that affects me more than most. As I am unable to attend many shows due to my work, I have to rely on the railways.

When I started keeping mice about two years ago I could send a box and two

Maxeys for 10s. Now the cost is nearly £1. However, although my nearest station, Yeovil, is six miles away I do try and support most opens and a few club shows.

I am not a highly paid 'whiz-kid', but I find that according to my receipts from the railways I have paid nearly fifty pounds over the past six months. However, I must mention that a good deal of this was on stock which I had sold.

A few people have talked about profit from Fancy mice—they must be kidding. With the exception of perhaps Mr J Hartley, who has done a terrific amount of winning in 1970 I doubt if anybody made a substantial profit, unless, of course, they charged 'excessive' prices for their stock. I believe no true fancier should expect to make a profit, but that any monetary gain should be looked upon as a bonus.

To move on to the subject of the Himalayan. Unlike many people I don't consider this mouse to be a true marked variety, no matter what rabbit and cavy fanciers may say. I believe its cousin, the Siamese, started life in the marked section but it was transferred to the AOVs.

I may appear to be biased as I breed Dutch and Broken and the Himalayans did a lot of winning in mid-1970, but I can assure you this is not the case. Besides, Dutch have made a 'comeback' and can more than hold their own again.

I believe a ruling that no variety shall be termed 'marked' unless its markings appear within seven to ten days of age; or something similar to this should be brought into effect.

The two new marked varieties given provisional standards, the Rump White and Tricolour have had mixed fortunes.

The Rump White is progressing quite well and should be a worthy addition to the Fancy. However, the Tricolour won't have much of a future unless a lot of work is done on it—quickly. The main failing with this variety is its 'whirling' characteristic. I have kept them on two occasions but have been unable to get them to breed satisfactorily.

I found Mr Tony Cooke's article on insecticides interesting. I myself use a louse powder which is meant for cattle and this seems to be very efficient. S G MAYNARD

### Are plastic wash bowls successful?

I INTEND to take up mice again after a lapse of sixteen years. Some time ago a lady fancier in FUR AND FEATHER said that she had solved her housing problem by using plastic washing bowls.

May I inquire through the Mouse pages if she has found any troubles with these.

a Did they sweat during the recent cold weather?

b Does she use separate nest boxes?

c What is used to cover the tops?

The bowls are available in a local store at 3s 6d each, and would save a lot of time and

trouble if they have proved satisfactory.

Can galvanised welded mesh be obtained anywhere in  $\frac{1}{2}$ " spacing? C G SUTTON, Woking, Surrey.

### Get rats to the shows

I HAVE seen several new colours of gerbil, including silver, cinnamon, albino, grey and cream. It seems that with a bit of trouble new colours can be made.

When these new varieties are available to anyone it would be interesting to see how many people keep them.

With regard to the rat, a club was going to be started by Fred Beach of the Central England Mouse Club, but apart from the letter that was printed in FUR AND FEATHER nothing else has happened.

There are quite a few people who own rats, but only a few of these try to send to every available show. People who own rats should get them into shows which have classes for them instead of leaving them behind. What is the point of having rats if you keep them at home all the time.

All rats are worth showing. The London and Southern Counties Mouse Club puts on classes for rats but every show is always between Steven Pugsley, Mary Dobson and myself.

I believe the CEMC puts classes on but they do not get many rats.

I know of at least a dozen rat breeders so why in the show results do the same names always crop up. Are some people scared of showing them against others.

I repeat, all rats are worth showing, so let's see more rats in rat classes. The clubs are good enough to put on classes so do try to support them. PAUL CRUDGINGTON, South East London.

### Standard for the Mongolian Gerbil

SINCE my article about the Mongolian Gerbil Society appeared in FUR AND FEATHER of December 3 1970, many people have requested the Mongolian Gerbils Standard.

The basic standard as laid down by the Mongolian Gerbil Society allocates as follows: Type 20, colour 20, condition 20, fur 15, size 15, eyes 5, ears 5. Total 100 points.

Penalties are: Disease or intractability, disqualification; sores, scars or wounds, minus 20 points (maximum); excess fat, 10; moulting, 10; dirty or stained fur, 10; dirty show pen, 5.

**Type:** The body shall be moderately firm and plump (but not fat). The head shall be short and broad and set well in to the body.

**Condition:** The Mongolian Gerbil shall be very alert at all times and easily handled. The fur should have a healthy sheen and not moulting.

**Fur:** The fur shall be thick and short as possible and soft to the touch. Attention should be made to the belly fur which shall be as dense as possible.

**Size:** The Mongolian Gerbil shall be as large as possible and the tail shall be the same length as the body when fully adult. The length of the tail will be judged in relation to the age of the Gerbil. The female size which is smaller than the males will be taken into account in mixed classes.

**Eyes:** The eyes shall be large (not bulging), widely set and bright.

**Ears:** The ears shall be fairly small, not too rounded and carried erect.

**Colour:** The top colour shall be a soft golden-red evenly covered with black ticking over the back and sides and carried well down to a dark grey at the roots. The belly fur shall be as white as possible. The under side of the tail shall be a slightly lighter colour than that of the body. The top side of the tail only shall be the same as the full length of the tail, shading to an almost black tip. The ears shall be covered with a fine light grey hair bordered with a soft golden-red free from ticking. The eyes shall be jet black and encircled with a distinctive light grey hair. The toe nails shall be black. K W SMITH, secretary Mongolian Gerbil Club

BIG 'A' LITTLE 'a'  
WHAT CAN IT BE?  
WHAT DOES THE BOOK SAY  
ABOUT LI'OLE ME.

IN BRED AND OUT BRED  
WITH ALBINO CROSS,  
FOR LITTLE FREDDIE  
A COMPLETE DEAD LOSS.



## Calder Valley suggests reduced fees for early entries

AT THE annual general meeting of the Calder Valley Mouse Club, held January 12, the following officials were elected for 1971.

**PRESIDENT:** Mrs E Longbottom.  
**VICE-PRESIDENTS:** B Longbottom, J Moreland, C Beckett, E Fletcher, J Hartley, J Kellett.

**TREASURER:** J Wormald.  
**COMMITTEE:** Mesdames C Beckett, J Wormald, K Pridgeon, Messrs M Bleazard, D Taylor, K Pridgeon, S Smith.  
**SECRETARY:** E Longbottom.

**SUBSCRIPTIONS** for 1971 are Adults 4s (20p), juveniles 2s (10p).

**SHOW DATES** for 1971: March 13, June 26, Nov 27.

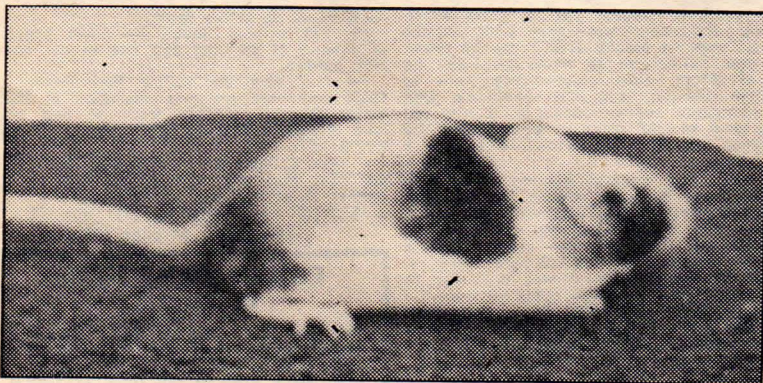
Over the past years the number of entries that show secretaries have been asked to accept on the day of the show has been gradually on the increase. At the last Calder Valley show 150 entries were given on the day of the show—nearly an impossible task for a secretary if judging is to commence on time. To make the show a success these entries could not be refused.

However, after a long discussion it was decided that at Calder Valley shows, for entries received during the week previous to the show the entry fee would be 1s per entry, but the entry fee for entries brought the day of the show would be 1s 6d per entry. E LONGBOTTOM, Secretary.

### BRADFORD-AT-HARROGATE

In spite of the strike of postal workers approximately 1000 entries have been received for the mouse section at Bradford-at-Harrogate. Fanciers have rallied round and either sent off early or telephoned.

If owing to the strike you have not received pen and rail labels, please send or bring your stock and they will be labelled at the show. If you mean to visit the show and have not already entered and wish to do so, please telephone your entry to J Kellett, Shipley 55621, by tomorrow (Friday).



**GENUINE TRICOLOUR?**

# 'ONE OF THE MOST GRACEFUL OF EXISTING QUADRUPEDS'

Eric Jukes continues his history of the rat

We now come to the varieties of *Rattus* described by Mr Brooke as 'one of the most graceful of existing quadrupeds, a thorough aristocrat.' It used to be thought that its extreme activity and timidity unfitted it for shows but H C Brooke considered himself the only person in the country to tame it. Mr Brooke goes on, 'but the fact that I won well with *Rattus*, both the Old English black variety, and the agouti Alexandrine, at Wadebridge and Newquay Shows in 1914 and 1915, shows what can be done. The agouti variety, with or without white belly, used to be but little known, and its occurrence gave rise to reports of the existence of hybrids between *Rattus* and *decumanus*. Dr Lewis Bonhote, now of the Cairo Zoo, first produced a fawn *Rattus*; when he left for Egypt Dr Eagedorn took over his stock and produced more fawns or yellows, some with fawn bellies, which we have not yet attained in our fancy Rats, also dove-coloured or blue-fawn, with a very blue tinge, and chocolate. Skins of these were inspected by Miss Douglas, Mr Tilling and myself. Sir Claud Alexander informs me he has seen some BE cream *Rattus*, and at the moment of writing I possess two lovely BE whites, the like of which Mr R I Pocock of the London Zoo, writes me he has never heard of. I also have a beautiful BE fawn *Rattus*.

One of these white *Rattus* has at the time of writing just won first and best in show at St Werburgh's and first and best in show, NMRC Summer Cup Show, Bristol, 1920; thus again proving the value of *Rattus* for exhibition purposes. The presumed mother of these Rats, a beautiful fawn doe, was unfortunately killed in Bristol in August 1920.

The Club description is as follows: In build, the varieties of *Mus rattus* (the typical representative of which is the Old English Black Rat) are much more slender and elegant than the common Rat, and considerably less in size. The head is long, nose well pointed, ears (as large as possible) about twice the size of those of the common Rat and so thin as to be almost transparent; eyes very black and full; coat rather long and shiny; tail very long and slender, tapering to a fine point. In the black variety the tail is black. The colour of the typical *Rattus* is a slaty black, the belly being of a bluish tinge. Slate-blue, greenish, blue-fawn or dove colour, cream, yellow, and chocolate are existing self colours. In the Alexandrine varieties the colour is, first in order of merit, a rich, well ticked ruddy or sable agouti, with pure white belly (*Mus rattus tectorum*, Bonhote); the next, agouti with grey belly (*Mus rattus alexandrinus*).

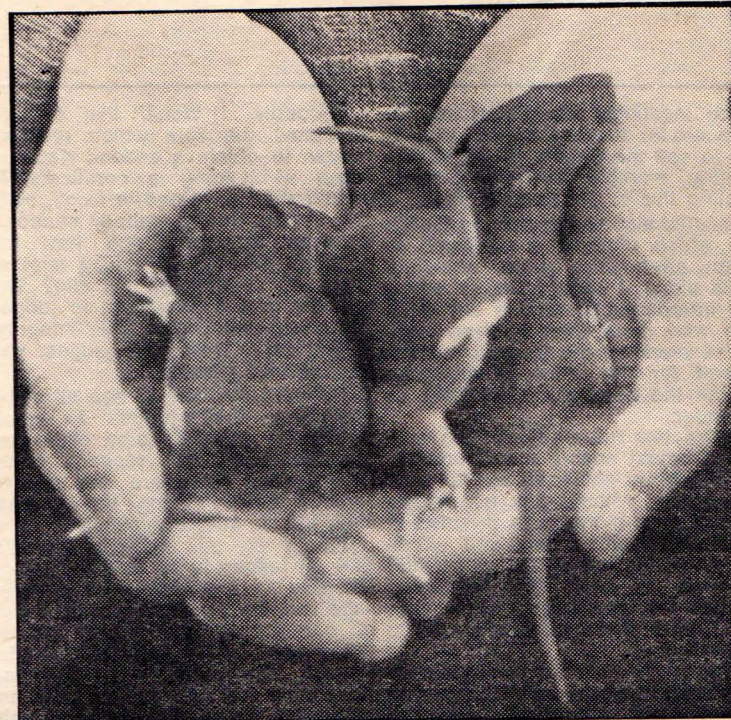
The rarest fixed variety appears to be greenish, an exotic form. I possessed specimens of this beautiful form in 1903: it did not appear to become known to scientists until 1905, when a specimen was taken in a London granary. Judging from descriptions, the later known specimens were far inferior in colour to those I possessed, which included in one litter greens, agouti, sandy and blacks: the mother I was told was a beautiful green specimen, but too wily for capture.'

## The clubs

I have dealt in some detail with the history of many of the varieties of fancy rat, but I have said little on the clubs which were fostering the rat Fancy. I have been unable to ascertain whether or not the National Mouse Club was founded in 1895 as the 'National Mouse and Rat Club' by which name it was for some time known.

The London and Southern Counties Mouse Club, of which I have the honour of being secretary, was founded in 1915 as the London and Southern Counties Mouse and Rat Club, and included in its founder members was the late Walter Maxey. I would imagine that the years from about 1905 until the outbreak of the first world war were the heyday of the rat Fancy. The London and Southern Counties Mouse and Rat Club dropped support for rats at its annual general meeting in 1934 on a proposition of a Mr King and Mrs Blowers "as the rat section of the Fancy was now dead as far as competition was concerned."

It was not to be for another twenty-four years that the National Mouse Club was to take the same course of action at its annual general meeting in 1957, although this does not mean the National Mouse Club was



A litter, thirteen days old

actively supporting the rat Fancy during this time.

It was probably the work of some sharp eyed member who noticed that the club was still "supporting" the rat Fancy and the proposal was merely to set the record straight.

In that same year (1957) the London and Southern Counties Mouse Club unanimously voted to reinstate classes for rats to its table show schedule. This was as a result of pressure from a Mr Edwin Gay of Portsmouth and a Mr Rayfield. Both of these fanciers did a lot of work in the late fifties in a vain endeavour to popularise the rat Fancy, including articles in *FUR AND FEATHER* and classes for rats at the Portsmouth shows.

In the early 1960's a 'National Rat Club' was formed but it never got off the ground and nothing further was heard of it.

Two or three years ago the London and Southern Counties Mouse Club again commenced including two classes for rats at its monthly table shows, the practice having lapsed after the initial enthusiasm in the late 1950's. Central England Mouse Club followed this example and now these are the only two clubs in the country that include classes for rats.

At the annual general meeting of the National Mouse Club in September 1970 I proposed that the NMC should 'promote the breeding and exhibiting of fancy rats for a probationary period of five years'. Although more were in favour of the proposition than those against it the proposal failed to gain the necessary two thirds majority to bring it into effect.

I have dealt now with the origins, show and club history of the fancy rat and I shall now go on to deal with the care and breeding of the rat, after which I shall deal with the existing show standards of the rat.

Turning firstly to the keeping and breeding of the rat, although many of the views expressed will be my own I shall be quoting extensively from *Fancy Mice and Rats*, by Walter Maxey, the section on breeding of rats being revised by Miss M Douglas and H C Brooke.

## Housing

It is quite obvious that rats require more space than mice and this may be one of the reasons why they are not popular. A cage for two to five rats should be not

less than 2 feet by 2 feet by 2 feet. Miss Douglas recommended a 'Tates Sugar box' but I presume that Tates Sugar probably comes in cardboard boxes, as is the case with many other goods these days. I have found, contrary to popular belief, that rats do not gnaw their cages any more than mice, and some rats never gnaw. I keep my rats in a cage with an open wire mesh front (half inch mesh) which is hinged and opens outwards. A tea chest or an old rabbit hutch would make an ideal rat cage.

Rats are gregarious animals and they like company. They will soon go out of condition if left on their own. In my opinion the greatest advantage that rats have over mice is the fact that male rats can be housed together and will seldom fight. Obviously care has to be taken here. It is not advisable to introduce a strange male into a cage already occupied by other male rats. The rats, including the stranger should be all put into a clean cage and then there will be no trouble.

Some time ago I saw a television programme in which a number of behaviour experiments had been carried out on rats particularly regarding 'territory'. It has been discovered that if a strange male rat is introduced to a cage already occupied by a male both rats will fight but the 'stranger' even if bigger than the 'occupant' will cower down, and, if left in the cage, will eventually die. Scientists have found that the dead 'stranger' usually has no marks which could account for death. Upon performing a post mortem on the rats the scientists have found the rat to be suffering from ulcers in the stomach, but this could not cause death. A mystery indeed!

Rat cages should be clear from damp and draughts as these will prove fatal to the rats.

Show cages for rats are of the standard 'Maxey' pattern, but differ from the mouse cage in size, also in not having the front lid or shutter. The colours are the same as Mouse Maxeys. (Specifications for a rat Maxey will appear after the rat show standards.) Extra care should be given to the matter of travelling boxes for the rat show cages, and their ventilation, in order that no draught can reach the exhibits as there are no lids to the Maxeys.

## Cleaning

The floor of the cage should be strewn with a thick layer of sawdust, which should be

scraped out and renewed when damp and soiled—How often this is necessary depends largely on the size of the cage and the number of rats in it.

For the nests I prefer to use hay as the rats can eat this. It should be used thoroughly dry of course.

## Feeding

The feeding of rats is basically the same as that of mice except that a little more variety can be introduced.

The staple diet for my rats is soaked bread which is squeezed dry and a little milk added, except in hot weather. I use brown bread but white bread would no doubt be just as good as there is probably not much difference in bread these days. Dog biscuits, boiled vegetables, clean household scraps and greens can also be given. Rats also relish a meaty bone occasionally. The fancier should not be afraid of giving his rats change of diet so long as the change is made gradually. Food is better given in heavy dishes which cannot be tipped over rather than laid on the sawdust. Rats like a drink of water although if moist food is given it is not essential except in hot weather. Unfortunately rats have an unfortunate habit of soiling the water and putting sawdust in it so water bottles would really be better. Do not forget that rats have strong teeth and so the water bottle should be of good quality glass.

Obviously rats need more food than mice. They should be given as much as they can eat as they will not overeat. I have noticed that my rats delight in burying their unwanted food and so it is best to see how much they leave and adjust the amount of food accordingly. I feed my rats once a day which is quite sufficient.

A basic feeding rule for rats is 'if you eat it, they eat it, if it does you good it does them good.'

## Grooming

Regular grooming does much to improve the appearance of the coat and keep it in the glossy condition which goes far towards securing red cards. A small drop of glycerine should be placed on the palm of the hand and then both hands rubbed together until all visible moisture has disappeared. The Rat should then be placed in any convenient position—on a table covered with a cloth, or on one's chest so he can hold on with his claws—and then stroked rapidly hand over hand from head to tail.

By this means all loose hairs are removed and the coat acquires a beautiful gloss. Care must, however, be taken to use as little glycerine as possible, or more harm than good will result.

In white rats the fur, after the first moult, is very apt to become stained, or to acquire a cream or ivory tinge instead of the pure white required by the standard. To keep the fur a good colour many fanciers dust into it arrowroot, cornflour or powdered chalk. This should be allowed to remain for a few minutes and then be carefully brushed out with a soft brush. The Rat may then be groomed with clean hands, and the greatest care taken to rub the hands well dry as well as to brush all powder out of the coat before grooming is begun. (The words in this section are by Miss Douglas and Mr Brooke. Personally, I disapprove of the use of white powders on mice or rats, or any other white animal).

## Breeding

The gestation period of the rat is twenty-one days and the young are born naked, blind and deaf. They are fully furred at twelve days and open their eyes at fourteen or fifteen days. At this age they begin to eat solid food starting on the soft food that the doe brings into the nest. They eat freely from the food dish at three weeks. They are mature at twelve weeks, will probably mate earlier than that, but it is not advisable to breed with them until fifteen weeks.

The buck should be removed from the cage before the litter is born as otherwise he will mate the mother straight away. Two does can litter down together if space is short. Rats often have very large litters, fifteen in the litter is not uncommon. I have noticed that cannibalism of the young by the mother is very rare, in fact I can go so far as to say that I have had no cases of this.