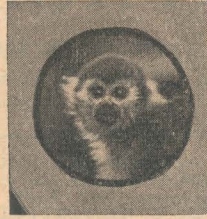


Odd Pets



The Life Story of a Black and White Rat

By FREDERICK FARRELL

Strange are the ways of animals, and among others, the rodent family seems to possess a high degree of intelligence.

On one occasion we had a black and white rat for a pet. The little creature frisked about the house with all the sprightliness of life, and there was no corner or opening in any of the rooms that he did not explore. His favorite hiding place was among the bed springs, and his cache in the far corner under a refrigerator.

A cage made from wood and wire with an upper and lower compartment was his living quarters, and so arranged that his nest was in one place, his food in another, and the upper part, connected by a couple of steps, simply a plain surface where he would walk around, sit up and look out in any direction.

Awaits Return

On our return home during the evening (and he never retired until we arrived) he would be in the upper part of the cage with his nose stuck through the wire and his eyes fixed on the door. When speaking to him he would utter a few squeaks, leave the cage, frolic about the room, climb on the sofa snuggle in our laps and always look for a coddling, and if not feeling well, would lie quietly and absorb sympathy.

He would eat almost anything and was very fond of sweets. Sitting on his legs he used the fore paws (and they were quite similar to the human hand) and would keep turning the morsels or gnawing from end to end anything in the form of a stem; after which he always cleaned them with spittle by rubbing the toes together.

Interesting Antics

His habits were many, and in some cases the actions were nothing short of antics. On going from one place

to another or from room to room he would invariably follow the wall, and always took special delight in pass-through dark ways. He knew the location of the bath room, and would never enter or go by it on the near side, but swiftly cross over and proceed on his way, for his aversion to water was uncanny. Even when being carried by the door, he would squirm, twist and turn his head in the opposite direction.

He possessed a peculiar trait for taking things. Spools of thread, rolls of yarn, pieces of chalk, buttons and pencils from the sewing basket, and other trifles from the writing desk that were lying about, and whenever missed they were found in his storing place. He would push the spools and balls of yarn along the floor with his nose, and carry the pencils and chalk by balancing them in his mouth.

He had a liking for jumping on chairs, walking along the arms and climbing on the backs, and would hop from one to another with a sagacity that was remarkable, always balancing himself by the use of his tail which served as a leverage. He particularly enjoyed getting on the window sill, promenading up and down behind the drawn curtains. When he had enough of that he would begin at one end and push the curtains aside with his nose until he came to where they divided, then leap on a chair or to the floor if not too high.

Occasionally we would take him out into the yard, but the outdoors did not seem to attract him in the least. We would put him on the grass and step off for about ten paces; for a few seconds he would gaze around, and whether by the sense of sight, scent or direction would walk straight to where we stood and look

up at us, and if we moved to another spot, he would repeat the performance. Should we go into the house, he would come direct to the entrance and wait for us to pick him up or open the door that he might enter.

Each night before retiring we would tear up some crepe paper and put it in his house, and upon entering it for the night he would rend it in smaller pieces and prepare his own nest. When completed he would bury himself in it, but always keep a watch on us until the light in the room was turned off or the door closed.

We always left the entrance to his cage open so he could come and go at will; and every morning after he had learned to know our rising time, he would come to our respective rooms, climb on the bed and nip us gently on the ear; once, twice, three times or more, until we spoke to him or caressed him in our hands. We then put him on the floor where he would scamper away and begin his day's routine.

At last the time came when his liveliness seemed to weary. He sought no companionship with us and had no desire to be petted, but spent his entire time in the cage staring in one direction. The food that was offered to him was pushed out of the box. He lingered on, but the end was fast approaching. His beady black eyes were growing dim, and every day we were expecting the worst. So one afternoon on returning from a short trip we stole quietly up to his cage. He had lived his allotted time.

Skunk's Popularity

Rating Raises

This article recently appeared in the *Chicago American Weekly*.

"Opportunities in the postwar world, it seems, are going to be brighter for everybody—including skunks.

"After resting practically at the bottom of the popularity list for centuries, stock in Skunks, Ltd., has been rising in the public estimation lately.

"It used to be that the name of the little striped wood pussy was anathema. People grabbed their noses at the mention of it. They ranked skunks with toads and snakes, but were willing to come a lot closer to the latter.

"Then, some years back, people began discovering that skunks really are friendly at heart and make nice pets—if they aren't frightened, or if