In Recommendation of White Rats

By JOYA DICKMAN

DESPITE much public opinion to the contrary, a healthy bred, home-raised white rat makes a very satisfactory pet, with a minimum of trouble and muss, provided its diet and living quarters are right.

I have found them to be clean in their habits, quick to learn their names, and to identify different people and show recognition and affection. They have independence, optimism and a sense of humor. Rats that are given kindly, personal attention each day give grateful response to this treatment. They will not in the least mind being handled, will even come when you call and will evince great pleasure in having a frolic about with their owner in the spirit of play. A bit of string trailed along the floor in the same manner as would intrigue a kitten will also spell fun to a rat. They like to run in and out of improvised tunnels or paper bags, and will sometimes sport about with a small rubber ball. But

they must be shown these things and encouraged when young, as the older rats are less frivilously inclined.

There is almost as much difference in personality among these little animals as there is among people. It is a mistake to believe that because your experience with one has been unsatisfactory that any to follow will be equally discouraging. Out of thirty rats that I have owned there were only two that could actually be called "cussed," and I attributed this to the fact that I had bought them at too advanced an age and to the possibility of their former owner's mishandling them. These were exceptional cases, however, and one is not obliged to keep a bad-tempered rat.

I have had numerous pets in my time and most all of them were tried in apartment-house life. After going right down the line from monkeys, dogs, cats, canaries and ferrets, to rats-I was forced to admit that the latter gave me the least trouble and were for the smallest amount of money the most fun. An excellent feature about them is that you need never give up a week-end trip on the excuse that this pet of yours has to be nursed along at home. With the comparatively small amount of food and drink that they consume it is a simple matter to stock them up sufficiently to last for two or three days, and if you follow my suggestion at the end of this article on the ideal type of cage you will find on your return that they have kept themselves fairly clean.

I do not suggest that a pet rat be allowed the run of the house unless you are prepared for trouble, because of course they gnaw with a vengeance, and will steal anything from the cupboard that is available. When you wish to allow him freedom it is best to have a place closed off where there is nothing at hand which he may damage by gnawing. He will hugely enjoy a run outside on the lawn should you possess one. But when

this exercise is over he should be put back into his cage so that he will learn his rightful place, and the extent of his privileges.

The rat indoors should have his cage somewhere where he can be observed and where he is in the presence of the family. In this way he takes an interest in what is going on and gains full confidence in his protectors. He must be kept out of draughts, and be given clean bedding whenever this becomes dusty or stained with whatever he may have chosen to eat there. (Rats, like some people, love to eat in bed!)

Many people object to rats mainly, if not wholly, on account of their long hairless tails. It is a simple matter to remove the cause of this objection by taking the baby when it is about three days old and snipping off the tail with a sharp, sterilized pair of scissors. Apply an astringent to stop bleeding, follow by a few drops of Merchurochrome and the operation is over. This heals in about two weeks and when the baby grows hair the stub of tail is almost entirely lost in the little puff of white fur. I have found that this procedure seems actually to benefit the youngsters. The nourishment that would otherwise be taken up by the tail is absorbed by the body and they appear much more robust than young babies with tails retained.

If you are thinking of getting a rat, I would suggest your buying a bred female and raising your own first litter. Later, when they are about 21 days old you can select the best from the lot and sell or give away the others. The advantage is that you will have a better and healthier stock to choose from, and they will be entirely tame.

The mother carries her children for from 21 to 23 days. When she is within about 24 hours of labor she will begin to arrange her bed. I definitely do not advise cloths as material for this at such a time since the babies will become lost in the folds of it and fail to nurse when they should.

(To be Concluded)

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FOR BEDDING, I tear up a news- too loose the assumption is that you 2" as the mother, in hovering over the babies, is quite capable of keeping them warm herself. She will have, as a rule, about 8 in her litter,-all born hairless and with closed eyes. Their skin is so thin that you can practically see every organ in their bodies. With the exception of the tail operation (on the third day) one should not handle the babies until they are nearly weaned because it makes the mother nervous and irritable and disturbs their nursing. The cage must be kept closed for if given an opportunity the mother will try to carry the young away to some dark corner and hide them. It is best to cover half the cage on the outside with a cloth or newspaper. This will insure a certain amount of darkness and privacy.

In two weeks the hair will come out on the babies and during the eleventh and twelfth days the eyes will begin to open. Weaning takes place in about 21 days but they will learn to eat considerably before they understand the principle of lapping from a saucer.

It was a long time before I understood that you cannot feed a rat cooked meat and vegetables, and everything from a dinner table without bad results. Do this and they will acquire a tenacious sort of itch that looks like poisoned oak. It will develop first on their ears and then about the root of the tail. They will scratch at it all day long, until their fur begins to fall out. Kur-mange will help abate it, but a radical change of diet is vital to complete the cure. The main part of their meals should be grain (wheat, corn, sunflower seed, etc.) milk, a little fresh fruit, lettuce or different kinds of raw vegetables in small quantities (they will soon indicate their preference) and sometimes they appear to like nuts. Contrary to popular belief, rats should not be fed cheese. This is hard for them to digest and will not be found of any benefit. They love watermelon, and will often drink chocolate? or tomato juice. Adherence to a diet of this sort will keep them in excellent health, and whatever smallamount of scratching they do will not indicate that anything is wrong, for much of it is in the nature of "preening." If, at times, the bowels are

paper into a size of about 2" x are giving too much fruit or vegetables. Remember to keep a strict watch on the ears for the red, raised places that provoke constant scratching and take it in hand at once if it develops.

> Anyone who does not know how properly to cage a rat will find their odor objectionable. I have kept them in everything from cigar boxes to bird cages, but none of these were satisfactory. The best thing to do is purchase an amount of galvanized 1/2" mesh wire and make the entire cage of this, including the floor. (Important: the floor strip must be raised up one inch from the bottom of the cage walls. This primary feature permits the droppings to fall thru and keep the rat's feet perfectly dry.) Underneath the cage put some kind of a shallow pan and line with newspapers or sawdust. The sawdust makes an almost complete deodorant. For bedding you may put some scraps of cloth or use, as before mentioned, bits of newspaper. In warm weather rats appear to prefer the latter. Two drinking dishes are advisable-particularly if you are out of the house all day and wish to leave a good supply of milk or water. For these, I find most preferable aluminum ladle spoons, not very large but deep. The handles of these may be bent double backwards and hooked into the wire in the side of the cage and made stationary.

In washing the cage (it is advisable to do this once a week) you will find it easy to scald and dry without fear of rust. You will notice that rats soon learn not to wet their beds and will always go to one corner to leave waste. You may wash the rats themselves once a week also. Warm water, soap, and a couple of drops of Lysol will do an excellent job. Be careful to keep the suds out of their eyes and ears. Rinse well and dry thoroughly. Some rats have absolutely no objection to a bath. Others scramble a bit.