

# A LONDON RATTERY

• By J. WILTON-STEER.

**D**URING my long connection with the Fur Fancy I have had the pleasure of visiting many famous rabbitries, caviaries, and mouseries, but never before a real rattery. Quite recently, at the invitation of that well-known breeder and exhibitor of fancy rats, Mr. Thomas Adams, The Rabbitries, Sydenham, S.E.26. I had the pleasure of seeing what must be the largest establishment of its kind in England, and a most interesting time I spent.

The rattery is a large, solidly-built shed, splendidly arranged so that one can walk round and view the stock with comfort. The pens are of the most simple construction, being Tate sugar boxes with fine wire netting front. They are most useful, roomy, easy to keep perfectly clean, and inexpensive to replace when necessary. There are no partitions for nests, they being quite open and a handful of fine hay is provided, and this the rats fashion into a nest in one corner. The floors are well covered with sawdust.

I was particularly struck by the absence of any smell, showing that our friend believes in perfect cleanliness. It was rather more surprising to me, because the rat is a partially carnivorous animal. The stock is given fish meal with the soaked bread, and Mr. Adams told me that every now and again they have bones, etc., from the butcher to gnaw. That, of course, also helps to keep their teeth in condition, and condition here is everything.

In the old days, when our dear friend Miss Douglas was alive, it seemed to be the exception rather than the rule to find rats in perfect condition. They generally had cankered ears and scaly tails, but I saw no such thing among the hundreds I inspected here. Mr. Adams told me he would not tolerate such a thing for one moment. The rats are fed from a movable wagon which runs round the shed, and it was most interesting to watch how they all eagerly came to the front of their pens impatiently waiting for their turn to come.

My former idea of rats was that while they are intelligent they are inclined to be very nervous. Of their intelligence there can be no doubt, and once they know their owner they make the

most interesting of pets, and are safer in their habits than are mice. The "dirty rat" is a canard. Given reasonable attention they are as clean as any animal on earth, and cleaner than a lot. They soil but a very small part of their pens which is easy to remove. With all these good qualities it is rather surprising the rat fancy does not flourish more, but perhaps these few words may draw several more fanciers into the fold. If so, I feel sure they will not regret it.

As regards varieties, the Fancy lagged behind for many years, being confined to the few; but Mr. Adams is altering all that. A stroll round the pens with our host reveals what he has to show us. The first pen holds a perfectly lovely albino doe with 13 young. I'm afraid she was like "the old lady in the shoe," but she did not seem to mind much. It was her job. Next came a pen for the production of black-eyed whites. None perfect yet, but coming on. The same trouble as with mice—traces of colour on ears and rump.

Chocolates, a pen of five lovely bucks all fit to show, I liked much. Then a pen of champagnes. I have never seen anything like them before. Truly wonderful. I should think they will make a great stir later on. Another novelty is creams. I remember a doctor friend of Miss Douglas produced what he called creams many years ago, but they were nothing like these. They were mealy, not clear.

Still more novelties—smokes. What a beautiful shade. I should imagine that with careful selection blues also may be obtained from these. Then I came across the most perfect albino I have ever seen. Its coat was a brilliant pure satin white and very fine in texture. I was shown specimens of *rattus*. This species has 250 segments in the tail, while *mus rattus* has only 200. They are also a very fine variety.

Before I close I must not forget the mice. As well as exhibiting Mr. Adams is one of our largest dealers in wasters. He sometimes handles many thousands a week. A pleasant chat on fanciers over the well-furnished tea-table sent me off to Walworth to judge the evening table show of the Southern M. and R. Club, where I was confronted with no fewer than 126 entries. My time with Mr. Adams was one of the most enjoyable afternoons I had spent for a long while. I wish

our friend all the success he undoubtedly deserves. May the Fancy grow so that soon we get some real competition, with rats not left only to the one or two fanciers who are enthusiasts to-day.



Stenning. London  
Mr. Adams in a corner of his huge Rattery.

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