

Why are we being overrun by rats?

Video transcript for introduction presented by Michaela Strachan

With big ears, dark eyes, long whiskers and a sleek furry coat, the rat should be one of our cutest and most loved animals.

For many though, it's exactly the opposite.

The English language is littered with negative associations with the poor old rat.

Things like "drowned rat", "gutter rat", "dirty old rat" are all too familiar.

But whatever you think, beauty or beast, there's no getting away from it, the rat is one of the most successful invasive species ever.

I guess it's not surprising that these rodents have a bad reputation.

Rats were the cause of the Black Death – the worst plague in history.

And today rats are responsible for spreading Weil's disease and other infections.

But look past this unfortunate attribute, and you find a truly fascinating animal.

There are two species of rat in the UK; the brown and the black but neither is native.

Both are Asian species. They arrived here as stowaways from as far back as Roman times.

Today the rat we see in our towns, cities and back gardens is the brown rat.

And like all rats, they have some really interesting adaptations which have helped to make them so successful.

This large, robust rodent can dig, burrow and swim and it breeds at an alarming rate.

With up to 15 million rats living in the UK in springtime, whether you like it or not, the rat is here to stay.

So what are the secrets of their success? And how have we contributed to the rise of the rat?

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