



Australian Rat Fanciers Society

**FREE
Brochure**



ABOUT PET RATS

&

The Australian Rat Fanciers Society

*An organisation dedicated to the welfare
and promotion of pet rats.*

Founded in 1996 - For the love of rats



Australian Rat Fanciers Society Inc

PHONE **0401 741 162**

EMAIL **ausrfs@ausrfs.org.au**

WEBSITE **www.ausrfs.org.au**

ADVICE LINES **0401 741 162 or 0498 021 237**

BOARDING SERVICE **Via the AusRFS email address**

RESCUE SERVICE **0411 670 215**

If the matter is urgent and you can't get in touch via the rescue number please call the club number above.

If you find a rat but, don't know if it's a pet rat that has been lost or a wild rat, please ring – we can usually identify which it is over the phone. If you need help with a native rat, contact Wildlife Vic on 1300 094 535

FACEBOOK **www.facebook.com/AustralianRatFanciersSociety**

INSTAGRAM **https://www.instagram.com/australian_rat_fanciers**

Australian Rat Fanciers logo designed by Rebecca Topliss, AusRFS member © 2004

All photos taken by AusRFS members ©

All the rats pictured are either owned by AusRFS members or wards of the AusRFS Rescue Service.

All humans pictured are AusRFS members (except visitors to our display featured on page 11. which were taken and used with permission)

Front cover: **Tex**
owned & photographed by Lisa O.



Nicole with her owner Laurens at an AusRFS display.

RAT FACTS

- The rats kept as pets are *Rattus norvegicus* (the Norway or Brown rat), this refers to their species not their colour! Our pets come in a wide variety of colours from white, fawn and brown through to black, and also in many different patterns.



AusrRFS Rescue rat

- Pet rats have been domesticated for hundreds of years, to the point where they are as different from wild rats as a Poodle is from a Wolf.
- Rats do not smell (unlike mice). They are extremely clean, and groom themselves in the same way a cat does.
- The average life span of a pet rat is 2-3 years.
- Rats are social and should always be kept in pairs or groups.
- A group of rats is referred to as a “Mischief”.
- Formally females are called Does, males are Bucks & babies are Pups. But most people just call them, girls, boys & babies!
- Females weigh around 400 grams. Males weigh about 600 grams but some can reach over 1 kilo!
- Females come on heat every 4-5 days (for about 24 hours) and can get pregnant immediately after giving birth.
- Gestation time is 21-24 days. Litters are usually between 4-24.
- Rat puppies are weaned at 4-5 weeks, they are completely independent at 6 weeks and reach puberty at 6-8 weeks.
- It is very rare for a well socialised pet rat to bite.
- You won’t catch “the plague” from a pet rat!
- Pet rats don’t need vaccinations.

PET RATS



***Orin owned by
Rob B & Louise G
at an AusRFS
display***

Rats are the complete opposite to what most people think. People are often surprised to learn that pet rats are sweet natured, gentle, affectionate, clean, social, curious, playful, happy and smart.

They make exceptional little pets, providing a similar level of companionship as a dog. In fact, they are often referred to as 'Pocket Dogs'.

They bond very closely to each other and their human families. A rat's favourite place is usually on the shoulder of its owner, joining in whatever they are doing. Most rats have a great sense of fun, and love to play. They can be trained to come when called, beg and do other tricks. They keep themselves meticulously clean & most will learn to use a litter tray. They are also very good travelers.

Rats naturally snooze on and off during the day, being more active in the late afternoon/evening which is perfect for those who are at work or school. But they do adjust to the schedules of their owners, so if a household is busier in the morning, the rats will be up and about then too.

Rats really do make great pets!

However, they do have some specific care requirements, so we recommend getting all the right information before deciding if rats are the right pet for you.

**If you have any questions about pet rats or their care,
please don't hesitate to contact the AusRFS.**

A Note to Parents

Rats can be fantastic pets for kids. They can help teach children about friendship, empathy, gentleness, responsibility and commitment. However, the AusRFS does not recommend them for children under about 6-8 years. Young children tend to grab and hold rats too tightly, and can seriously injure a rat by dropping or sitting on or even throwing a rat, and these things can happen in the blink of an eye. Please consider the maturity of your child and what level of supervision will be needed before agreeing to let your child have rats as pets.

Please remember that ultimately the responsibility for the care of the rats will be yours. So, if your child loses interest in the rats, are YOU willing to continue to provide the rats' physical and emotional needs?

CONSIDERING RATS AS PETS?

Things to think about **BEFORE** you purchase.

Although rats are relatively inexpensive to purchase, they are not low maintenance pets. So before making the final decision to get pet rats, there are a few things that you should give serious thought to.

Do you have enough money to provide for your rats?

Rats need a fairly large cage (NOT a glass aquarium as they need maximum air ventilation). They also need accessories such as food bowls, drip water bottle, sleeping house, hammocks, toys, etc. The minimum initial set up cost is about \$300.

Rats also need good quality food, not the products that are sold in supermarkets as “rat mixes”. The ideal diet consists of a quality rat pellet, plus a variety of fresh foods. Please see the Diet Chapter in the AusRFS care book or contact us for advice.



***Rat Cage
owned by Wendy C***

Rats also need bedding material and a good quality litter, which is suitable for rats (we recommend Breeders Choice).

Are you willing to take good care of your rats?

Rats need to be kept inside the house, not in the backyard or shed. Rats are sensitive to heat, hot conditions can be fatal. So on hot days it's very important they are kept cool. Their cage, food bowls etc will need to be cleaned and bedding and litter changed regularly.

Do you have time to spend with your rats?

Because rats are intelligent and form a close bond with their owners, they need time out of their cage and interaction with their human family every day. This should include the opportunity to stretch their legs, exercise and play or just explore around a room or large area, plus some quality time interacting with their owners, even if it's just cuddling up on your lap while you read or watch TV. An hour of out of cage time per day would be the minimum.

If they get sick or injured, will you take them to a vet?

Most vets don't know much about rats, so you may have to travel out of your local area to a vet who is experienced in treating them. If necessary, you might also have to purchase medication. The AusRFS has a list of vets who are experienced in treating rats.

Are you willing to keep more than one rat?

Rats require the company of at least one other rat (of the same sex or desexed). They are very social animals and spend a lot of time grooming and interacting with each other. Keeping a pet rat in a cage on their own is like solitary confinement. Single rats are much more likely to be nervous and can suffer from depression. Two rats will not be any more work or any less bonded to you and will keep each other company when you can't be with them. Watching rats eat, sleep, groom and play together is one of the great joys of rat ownership.

Can you keep your rats safe from other pets?

In most cases other pets will need to be kept away from your rats.

Some people's cats and dogs are friends with their rats, while others can't even be trusted in the same room as the rats' cage. So the level of interaction that can be allowed differs greatly between households. But please be aware that even a friendly dog can easily kill a rat accidentally while playing or even by stepping or sitting on it. As a general rule, other pets should be kept out of the room when your rats are out of their cage. It's always best to err on the side of caution.

Can you handle some negative comments about your pets?

The word is slowly spreading and people are becoming more accepting of our unusual pets. But there will always be those who are negative, even rude and insulting when you tell them that you have pet rats. Some people are just plain scared of them and no matter how you try to tell them about your darling ratties, nothing will change their minds.

Joining the AusRFS can help there, you will find support and friendship of people that understand and care about rats as you do.

Can you handle the fact that rats have a short lifespan?

Although rats only live for 2-3 years, they pack those years with so much enthusiasm and love that it can be devastating to lose your beloved friend after such a short time. Rats can also grieve for the loss of their companion, especially if they've only been kept as a pair. So if you only have 2 rats, as they get older it's a good idea to introduce a couple of young ones, so you are not left with a lonely single rat when their friend dies.

Are you willing to commit to 2-3 years of rat ownership?

Rats are extremely aware, social, loving animals, that bond very quickly with their new families. They are pack animals and once adopted they become part of your pack and you become their pack leader. They will look to **you** for **all** their needs - physical and emotional.

RATS HAVE FEELINGS - you can see the love, trust and even the hurt or grief in their eyes. It isn't fair to lose interest after a while and abandon them.

They still love you! Can you promise not to let them down?

***To the world you are one person,
to a rat you are the world.***



Maple enjoying a snack with her owner Gem

If you have answered **NO** to any of the above questions then pet rats are probably not for you.

The AusRFS Rescue Service is constantly receiving surrendered and abandoned rats from homes where the owners have not thought through these issues.

If however you have answered **YES** to all the questions, then perhaps you are one of those people who will be lucky enough to know the love and joy that pet rats bring to our lives.

So read on . . .

What to do now

If you can make it to one of our displays that's a great way to meet some different rats and speak to their owners about what it's like to live with ratties. All our events for the current year are listed at the back of this booklet, on our Website and Facebook page. Otherwise please feel free to call us. It's also a good idea to read through our book "The Pet Rat Care Guide". Please make sure you have all your questions answered before making the final decision.

Once you are sure rats are for you, then we can help you find your new companions, a cage and everything else they need.

You might also like to join the AusRFS, this is a great way to learn and share experiences with like-minded people. New members receive a free copy of The Pet Rat Care Guide. Getting pet rats can involve a very steep learning curve, so new owners especially get a lot out of membership.

Where to buy

We recommend purchasing from our Rescue Service, our society goes to a lot of effort to ensure our rescue is run to the very highest standards.

If purchasing elsewhere, please do your homework and ask the seller lots of questions. If you have any reservations, go elsewhere. Please also keep in mind that an impressive website doesn't necessarily reflect a person's experience, ethics, or breeding practices.

Rats sold in pet shops or by inexperienced or unethical breeders have often been indiscriminately bred, inadequately socialised, and inappropriately housed. They are often sold far too young or suffering from illness. The care and housing advice given can be completely wrong. It's also very common for these people to incorrectly sex babies resulting in males and females being kept together, so people who buy female rats often discover their rat is pregnant.

On-line trading sites are also not a good choice to find your new pets, as respected breeders are unlikely to advertise their rats in this way. They are more likely to be mass breeders or feeder breeders (people who breed rats as food for other animals).



The Australian Rat Fanciers Society

*The AusRFS is based in Melbourne and is a club for owners of domesticated pet rats (*Rattus norvegicus*).*

We are a very active, social and family orientated club. Members come from all walks of life, backgrounds and age groups but share a common passion – RATTIES.

AIMS & OBJECTIVES

- To show the public what wonderful pets rats can be.
- To educate & provide information about how to care for pet rats.
- To promote responsible pet ownership and breeding practices.
- To raise awareness of the differences between domesticated pet rats and wild rats.
- To provide social opportunities for rat owners.
- To operate a rescue service to take in and rehome abandoned or surrendered pet rats.
- To run a boarding service for pet rats.
- To discourage purchasing any animal, and rats in particular from pet shops and mass breeding facilities.
- To maintain a register of reputable ratteries.
- To encourage purchasing of rats from AusRFS Registered Breeders or our Rescue Service.
- To offer opportunities for owners to show their rats.

HISTORY

The Australian Rat Fanciers Society was formed in Melbourne in 1996 and became an Incorporated Association in 2003. The AusRFS is the largest and oldest rodent club in Australia.

The word “fancy” is an old English term meaning “hobby”. So a Fancy Rat is a rat that is kept as a pet or hobby, and a Rat Fancier is a person who keeps rats as a pet or hobby. This name was chosen for our society to convey a sense of the history of rat keeping. Rats have been kept as pets for hundreds of years.

RESCUE SERVICE

The AusRFS takes its animal welfare role very seriously and our Rescue Service is one of the most important aspects of our Society. Because we promote rats as pets, we believe we also have a responsibility to provide a safety net for pet rats if things go wrong.

To date we have taken in & rehomed well over 11,000 rats.

The average is about 300 per year, but some years that number is far exceeded.

The Rescue Service is totally funded by donations and fundraising.

Where do the rescue rats come from?

Unfortunately, like cats and dogs, pet rats can end up without a home for a variety of reasons and through no fault of their own. They can be lost or abandoned, their owners might surrender them because they are no longer able to care for them or because they simply don't want them anymore.

Changes in family circumstances and owners moving house are the most common reasons for surrender. We also get a lot of calls for help from people who have bought female rats from a pet shop only to discover that the rat was already pregnant.

The majority are surrendered directly to us by their owners, but most animal shelters in Victoria, including the RSPCA, also pass on pet rats to us for rehoming.

How does the Rescue Service Operate?

All rats that come into the Rescue Service undergo a basic health check and parasite treatment and receive medical treatment if necessary. Then they are either housed with our Rescue Service Co-ordinator or fostered by club members for a while so their health and personality can be assessed, and to be sure that females are not pregnant, before being offered for adoption.

What sort of rats are available?

We usually have a variety of rats, but it's the nature of rescue that numbers fluctuate and the ages, sexes, personalities & colours available varies.

Since pregnant or nursing females are frequently surrendered, we often have babies which have either come to us at a very young age or been born in our care. But we also have older rats. These lovely oldies still have a lot of love to give and deserve a second chance of a forever home.

We always do our best to find homes for all our wards, but rats are only ever adopted into homes that are appropriate to the particular rat and visa versa. If we don't have a rat that is suitable, the person can be placed on a waiting list, as things can change from day to day.

Adopting from the AusRFS Rescue Service

All rats are adopted directly from the AusRFS, never via a third party. New owners complete an adoption agreement and receive full care information and ongoing support. The small adoption fee goes back to fund future rescues. We have a full return policy for the life of all rats adopted from us.

Do rescue rats make good pets?

Yes! Rats are very adaptable and naturally bonded to humans, even those that have been abandoned or come from bad situations, settle into their new homes very easily. Some owners even say that rescues are more loving, and seem to be grateful for their new life. Almost all the rats brought to AusRFS displays to meet and greet with the public, and featured in this brochure are rescues that our members have adopted.

Unfortunate pasts & happy endings

Over the years we have saved rats from some terrible situations. Left abandoned in their cages with no food or water, in flats after their owners have moved out, put out on the nature strip for hard rubbish collection, in a rubbish skip, in a box on a park bench in over 40° heat and left out in the cold & rain.

On a number of occasions, we have been called on to take in large groups from animal hoarders. Either after the people concerned have realised that the situation has got out of hand, or after the animals have been seized by the authorities.

The three largest groups consisted of 300, 147 and 119 rats varying in ages from newborn to elderly.

Dealing with these large groups is a big stretch on the society's financial resources as well as involving a lot of work, time and emotional commitment by our members who provide special care, socialisation and training where needed. But we always put the welfare of the rats first - that's what the AusRFS is all about. Even when dealing with large intakes of rats, every single one is given individual attention and are only adopted into a loving, responsible forever homes.

DONATIONS

Donations of any amount are always gratefully received. All money goes into our Rescue Service account to be used solely for food, housing, and medical treatment for the wards of our Rescue Service.

Our account details are:

Name: Australian Rat Fanciers Society.

BSB: 033060. Account No: 328949



*Photo taken by
Julie Mc. Former Rescue
Service Co-ordinator*

WEBSITE

www.ausrfs.org.au

Our website provides information about the AusRFS and all our activities. There is information about keeping rats as pets and an online shop selling rat related items. AusRFS Members can log into a Members area to access club documents, notices & back issues of newsletters.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Keep up with all our activities and latest news easily by following us on Facebook or Instagram. We post lots of photos from all our events, as well as sharing general items of interest to rat/animal lovers. Remember to “Like” us!



ADVICE SERVICE

Experienced AusRFS members are available to provide advice about rat care and welfare by phone to anyone who needs it. Assistance is also available by email or private message via our Facebook page.

BOARDING SERVICE

The AusRFS can arrange to care for rats when their owners go on holidays, etc. Boarders are cared for by experienced AusRFS members in the carer's home. Owners and carers complete a Boarding Agreement and the small, set fee is paid directly to the carer. *The AusRFS doesn't make any money from this service.*

COMMUNITY VISIT TEAM

The Community Visit Team visit nursing homes or other community groups/facilities and present a basic talk about rats. This is followed by a 'meet and greet' session where participants are invited to interact with our rats, with either a pat, cuddle or just watching the rats on their play table.

EDUCATION TEAM

The AusRFS Education Team visit schools to teach students about Pet Rats. These classes are mostly for those studying veterinary science and animal studies, but the team is also available to speak, and introduce our rats to other groups. Please see our website for further information.

MERCHANDISE

The AusRFS sells a range of items for rats and rat lovers at all our events and via our website. Rat hammocks are our most popular item, and the wonderful AusRFS sewing team make hundreds of beautiful, cosy hammocks each year. Each hammock is made with love, by a rat lover!

PUBLICATIONS

As well as this brochure, we produce advice sheets covering such things as cage selection, health issues, etc.

The AusRFS has also written a comprehensive book *The Pet Rat Care Guide* which covers everything the Australian rat owner needs to know. The book is available at all displays or via our website.

REGISTERED RATTERIES

The AusRFS maintains a register of ethical, responsible rat breeders who have passed the society's comprehensive registration process, which involves a home inspection and annual review. Our registered breeders adhere to the AusRFS Breeders Code of Conduct.

SHOWING

Owners have a lot of fun showing their pets. Some shows are open to anyone to enter and some are just for AusRFS members.

We believe that all pet rats are beautiful in their own way, and **all** entrants are admired and appreciated. The most important thing is that the rats are healthy, well cared for, friendly and don't mind being handled by strangers.

At Championship Shows, the rats are judged on their condition, conformation, presentation, temperament and colour/pattern. But there are always sections for rats that don't fit the show standard. For example in Pet Section, the entrants are judged on "pet" qualities such as personality.

Fun Shows are more informal, with categories such as Longest Tail, Cuddliest Rat, Most Playful Rat, Most Affectionate Rat, Most Handsome Boy Rat, Prettiest Girl Rat, and even treat eating competitions!

Aspen with her owner Gem



DISPLAYS



The AusRFS holds displays at many pet expos and community events around Victoria. One of the AusRFS display signs, reads *"Prejudices Dispelled Here!"* The aim is to show the public what pet rats are really like, and provide correct information about these wonderful little creatures and how to care for them.

Our members take great pride in their rats and their club and our display reflects this. The fact that rats are often misunderstood by the public makes us even keener to get out there and dispel the misconceptions. The members manning the display bring their own pet rats and visitors are encouraged to interact with them. We love to talk about our much loved pets, but our rats themselves are the best ambassadors. A play table is set up with toys, etc to allow visitors to spend some time patting or playing with some of our gorgeous rats.

Large display boards are filled with our members' photos including their cage and play area set ups - this gives visitors a better idea of what it's like to live with pet rats and shows the cages they should be kept in at home, which are very different to the small travel cages we bring our rats to displays in.



***Yogi on the play table at an AusRFS display, ready to make some new friends.
Yogi owned by Kim, Julian & Matthew T.***

Free printed material about pet rats is available, as well as our very reasonable priced book – *The Pet Rat Care Guide*.

We have lots of rat related items for sale and lucky dips for the kids.

The welfare of our pets is our number one priority, and rats always remain under their owner's supervision.

Our rats are bonded with humans, they enjoy being patted and handled, and take all the attention in their stride. But we have strict rules and constant monitoring to ensure that they are always relaxed and comfortable.

We do not sell rats at AusRFS events, as we believe that a new pet should never be an impulse decision. Instead, we provide all the information and advice needed to make an informed decision.

Once people are sure that rats are the right pet for them, we can help them acquire their new companions, and everything they need.



***Visitors to an AusRFS display,
enjoying meeting our rats.***

MEMBERS EVENTS



AusRFS Christmas Party

Members and their rats enjoy a variety of social gatherings. All are friendly, relaxed days with great company, great food and lots of “rat chat”. Rats are always the centre of attention of course, and they enjoy these days as much as their owners do.

Regular members’ events include: Fancy Dress Party, Spring Gala Day, Annual Show, Rat Health Day, Annual General Meeting & Christmas Party.

JUNIOR MEMBERS

The children in our society are valued members and are encouraged to participate in all our activities.

Please note:

Children under 16 must be accompanied to AusRFS events by an adult member. Therefore we don’t offer single junior membership.

Membership is optional for children under 5 years. Members may bring their children under 5 to events without having to join them as a member.

Family membership covers all family members whatever their age.



*Charlotte, Caleb and James
& their rats at an AusRFS display*

MEMBERSHIP

Anyone who owns, or is interested in pet rats is welcome to apply to join the AusRFS. If you have any questions about the club, then just give us a call, email, or drop in at one of our displays.

Members receive a comprehensive Members Kit, copy of our book *The Pet Rat Care Guide*, regular newsletter *Rat Tales*, and invitations to attend all AusRFS public displays, shows and social gatherings. Members also receive reduced rates for show entries and discounts for a variety of merchandise.

Exclusions

The AusRFS does not accept membership applications from:

- **Feeder Breeders** (*people who breed rats as food for other animals*).
- **Breeders of Double Rex, Hairless, Patchwork, or Manx (tailless) varieties of rats.**

(These varieties can suffer from health issues and the AusRFS considers it unethical to breed them. Since we don't wish to promote these varieties in any way, they cannot be brought to our public displays or bred by members.)

MEMBERSHIP CATEGORIES / FEES

A \$15 initial joining fee is applicable to all new memberships (per single, couple or family).

Single – \$35 including joining fee for first year (\$20.00 pa thereafter)

Must be at least 16 years of age. (see note re Junior Members)

Couple - \$45 including joining fee for first year (\$30.00 pa thereafter)

Two people living at the same address. Either two adults or an adult and a child (one person must be at least 16 years)

Family - \$55 including joining fee for first year (\$40.00 pa thereafter)

All those living at the same address (1 person must be at least 16 years).

Membership runs for a calendar year 1st January - 31st December.

Those joining between 1st July - 30th November pay half the annual fee, plus the \$15 joining fee.

Those joining after 1st December pay the full annual fee (plus \$15 joining fee) but have their membership carried forward until 31st December the following year.

The AusRFS offers a cooling off period. If within 30 days, a new member decides that the AusRFS is not for them, then on return of their Members Kit, their membership will be cancelled and fees fully refunded.

MEMBERSHIP FORM

Please visit the Membership Page of our website to download a membership application form.



A ward of the AusRFS Rescue Service enjoying a day out at our display at Red Hill Show.

The AusRFS acknowledges the generous support of our sponsors



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231 Whitehorse Road, Blackburn

Phone: 9878 3033

Website: www.whitehorsevet.com.au

Offering experienced & caring service to all rat owners.



SOUTH EASTERN
Animal Hospital

357 Centre Road, CLAYTON

Phone: 9544 6979

Website: southeasternvet.com.au

AusRFS EVENTS 2024

- Sunday 11 February** **AusRFS Annual General Meeting, Elsternwick**
(Members Meeting & Social gathering)
- Saturday 9 March** **Red Hill Show, Red Hill**
(Display & Open Show at Public Event)
- Sat 13 & Sun 14 April** **The Pet Show, Melb Showgrounds, Ascot Vale**
(Display at Public Event)
- April (date TBC)** **Frankston Pets Day Out, Frankston**
(Display at Public Event)
- Sunday 19 May** **AusRFS Annual Show, Cranbourne North**
(Members Championship Show & Social gathering)
- Sunday, 16 June** **Collingwood Childrens Farm, Abbotsford**
(Display at Public Venue)
- Sunday 18 August** **AusRFS Rat Health Day, Venue TBC**
(Members event)
- Sunday 8 September** **AusRFS Spring Gala, Eltham**
(Members Championship Show & Social gathering)
- October (date TBC)** **Whitehorse Spring Festival, Nunawading**
(Display & Open Fun Show at Public Event)
- Saturday 9 November** **Djerriwarrh Community Festival, Melton**
(Display at Public Event)
- Sunday 1 December** **AusRFS Christmas Party, Venue TBC**
(Members Social gathering)



Rosie, owned by Jackie O.