

Facts About: Controlling House Mice



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Description

The house mouse was brought over from the Old World by the early settlers. The technical name for the house mouse is *Mus musculus*, which means "little thief". Its typical color is dark gray on the back, gradually changing to ashy gray on the abdomen. Variations occur all the way from black to an occasional albino. The ears are large and prominent. The tail is small and slender, being about the length of the head and body. House mice are among the smallest of the rodents, weighing only about .5 to 1.0 ounce. In some instances they may be confused with the native white-footed mice, which sometime invade buildings in semiwooded areas and cause similar damage.



Reproduction

The female may give birth to young during any month of the year, especially in warm and secluded locations. The gestation period is approximately 21 days, and from 5 to 8 litters averaging 5 young each are born during a single year. Juveniles are dependent upon the mother for about 3 weeks and reach maturity in 2 to 3 months. Although caged mice may live for 2 years or longer, it is probable that few wild mice survive more than a year.

Diet

These rodents eat the same food as man, but under natural conditions are regarded primarily as seed eaters. Foods high in protein or sugar content, such as peanut butter, bacon, ground meat, cheese, cookies, and candy are readily consumed. Diet varies in different environments and some mice will subsist on such items as live insects, starch, clothing, and glue in bookbindings. Although they will take water readily if available, water requirements are slight, and they can live for many months on a dry-grain diet. The animals are light, intermittent, erratic feeders, and they must eat several times during a 24-hour period. Depending upon human interference, the mice may be active during either day or night. If adequate food and shelter are available, their range is very limited and they may not travel more than 10 to 20 feet from their nest site.

Economic Impact

The common house mouse is more destructive than any of the 300-odd kinds of native mice found in North America. This introduced rodent had its origin in Asia and has followed civilization to all parts of the world. It is a source of annoyance and damage in nearly every locality where food, clothing, or manufactured goods are processed or stored. Losses of grain and feed on farms, and cereal products in food plants, warehouses, stores, and homes annually cost the public many millions of dollars. Total damage thus inflicted probably exceeds that caused by any other destructive animal except the Norway rat.

Mice Spread Filth

House mice and their parasites are known to carry several human diseases. Since they live in closer proximity to man than any other wild animal, their presence is important from the standpoint of public health. Probably the greatest hazard is caused through contamination of food, and instances of food poisoning are directly traceable to this cause. Tremendous quantities of stored and processed food are annually rendered unfit for human use because of the presence of mouse droppings, urine, and hair. Many seizures by food and drug officials result from this type of contamination. Filth, bacteria and other substances transported on the fur and feet of mice spread contamination throughout homes and business establishments.

Mice thrive where food is plentiful and harborage is present. Any steps that reduce these two requirements will discourage their numbers. Good housekeeping is imperative. The elimination of hiding places is particularly important, and holes in walls, floors, or foundations must be sealed off or screened over to prevent new infestations. Migrations from adjoining fields often occur with the coming of cold weather in the fall of the year.

Mice can squeeze through holes over 1/4 inch in diameter, so it is important that foundations, doors, and windows be frequently inspected and small openings closed.

Trapping

Light infestations of mice can be removed through the use of several ordinary snap traps. These should be placed at right angles along walls between objects, or by holes and damaged materials, so that the trigger mechanism intersects the probable route of travel.

One of the most attractive baits is peanut butter smeared over the trigger surface. Other good baits are cake, doughnuts, flour, fried bacon, nutmeats, jam, cheese, and soft candies, particularly chocolate or gum drops. A sprinkle of rolled oats or dry cereal over and around baited traps is sometimes helpful. Trap-shy individuals may be caught by hiding the whole trap under a thin layer of flour, rolled oats, or similar lightweight material. At times a small wad of cotton attached to the trigger may be used to catch a mouse in search of nest material.

Food Baits

Poisoned baits will reduce heavy infestations of house mice.

House mice are nibblers. They feed frequently, but eat very small amounts each time. Therefore, poisoned food baits should be attractive enough to encourage consumption of a lethal quantity. Mice may refuse to eat a bait if the same food or poison is used continuously, hence, food or poisons should be changed if acceptance declines. The following foods rate high in acceptance: ground, fried or raw lean bacon, peanut butter, nutmeats, cake, sugar, bread crumbs, cracked corn, rolled oats, canary seed, sunflower seed, and wheat. Graham crackers, popcorn, and sweet chocolate and peanut hearts are also well taken at times.

Bait Stations and Placement

Bait stations should be placed approximately 10 to 15 feet apart near convenient mouse cover or along walls where mice travel. These stations should be made of sturdy materials so they will not be easily crushed, knocked out of position or turned over.

Glues

Special sticky glues to catch mice are available. Spread glue on pieces of cardboard (about 8"x12") and place near holes or where mice run.