

If you are plagued by rats, think twice about getting a cat

adapted from an article by Michael Le Page



- 1 A team led by Michael Parsons of Fordham University, New York, has been studying a rat colony at a recycling plant in New York City. They use infrared cameras to monitor the area. When feral cats moved into the plant last year, the researchers were 3. They thought the colony would be decimated. However, over five months, they saw just three attempts by cats to catch rats, only two of which succeeded. "Luckily for us, the rat population is still thriving," says Parsons.
- 2 Cats have good reasons to be cautious. The common rat (*rattus norvegicus*) has large incisors that can inflict a painful bite and carry lots of diseases. 4, cats find it easier to digest smaller prey: rats weigh 340 grams on average — compared with 25 grams for a mouse. Therefore, Parsons thinks that only starving cats will attempt to tackle rats, unless the rats are sick or injured.
- 3 However, cats do have a big influence on rat behavior. "Rats 5 the risk posed by cats," says Parsons. His team found that when cats are in the area, rats creep around more cautiously. They are still there, but hide from view. Most people, however, assume they see fewer rats because cats are good at killing rats.
- 4 Some cat owners may be convinced their pets are excellent ratters. But Parsons found that many people mistake mice for rats. That said, it is possible there are a few exceptional moggies that do take on healthy, adult rats, he says.

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