

## **Brown Rat (*Rattus norvegicus*)**



### **Taxonomy:**

Family Muridae. The brown rat is a commensal species with a nearly world-wide distribution. The taxonomy of this species is complex, with many named subspecies. Also called Norway rat. The laboratory rat is a highly inbred domesticated version of this species.

### **Description:**

A large rat similar in size to our native woodrats (*Neotoma*) but distinguished by its harsher pelage and nearly naked tail with obvious scales. The tail is shorter than the head and body length.

Total length: 316-460 mm; Tail: 122-215 mm; Hind foot: 30-45 mm; Weight: 195-485 g.

### **Distribution:**

Widespread in North America, particularly in urban areas. Not known from Utah before about 1900. Common at lower elevations along the Wasatch Front.

### **Ecology and diet:**

The commensal brown rat is generally restricted to areas heavily modified by humans. They are usually found in and around buildings. They are major pests, destroying stored foods and other commodities and transmitting disease. Domesticated rats are widely kept as pets and used in laboratory research.

### **Life History:**

Brown rats are prolific and when food is abundant may reproduce year-round. They have large litters and young grow fast and rapidly reach sexual maturity. In Utah, they are largely limited by winter temperatures and generally do not survive well unless they have access to buildings.

**References:** Durrant 1952; Hall 1981.