



Why Should You Be Owned By More Than One Rat?

Although it is common knowledge in the Rat keeping community that you should be owned by more than 1 rat, we often find that this information is generally not known by people that are new to Rats.

We are hoping, after reading this article, that if you do not have more than one rat that you would at least consider the possibility of adopting another rat of the same sex as a companion for your rat.

There are many reasons why having a “mischief” (group of rats) is beneficial to your rats. It is generally easier if you get 2 or more rats, from the same litter, at the same time, or buy 2 or more from the same cage when you adopt. Although you can introduce rats from different litters at just about any age this needs to be done slowly and carefully (more will be done on introductions in the near future).

Rats have a social structure. Within this structure there is the Alpha Rat (the boss if you will), then sub-dominant and on the bottom of this structure the Beta.

Structure of Rat Heirachy.

Alpha (Boss)

Sub-Dominant

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Sub Dominant
Beta (Lowest)

It has been known, in large mischief's, that the Alpha rat has a “right hand rat” to help keep the peace. Social structure is worked out amongst the mischief of rats by “duelling”, this can be semi-aggressive but normally consists of pushing, nipping the nap of each other necks, flipping, boxing and power grooming. The Alpha rat will occasionally be challenged, however, if the mischief consists of all the rats being the same age it generally ends in the Alpha rat giving someone a very thorough power groom with the “loser” walking off with their head held low.

Within a mischief of rats you will generally see quite a bit of activity amongst the rats. They will all spend time grooming each other, as well as playing games of chase, flipping, nipping, boxing, food stealing and stashing of food. The group also tend to sleep together in a “Rat Pile”, this keeps everyone warm and also provides safety from predators.

When you only have 1 rat they can become very bored and lonely leading to undesirable behaviours like barbering, self mutilation & aggression.

Barbering is like an obsessive disorder where the rat spends, sometimes hours, biting off their fur at skin level. Barbering, once started, is almost impossible to stop as it becomes compulsive. Although barbering is not life threatening or dangerous it can signal that there is a problem that needs to be resolved. Occasionally when barbering the rat may break the skin, this needs to be kept clean and watched for signs of infection. If you suspect that the cuts are getting infected you will need to go and visit your local vet for treatment.

Self Mutilation, although quite rare can happen if a rat is kept alone and is stressed.

Mutilation generally occurs on the tail and legs and can cause death if the cause is not investigated and a solution found.

Aggression in rats kept alone has also been noted, again it varies from rat to rat with some rats accepting a solitary life and others not. Aggression can be caused from an excess amount of stress triggers making the rat feel unsafe. In males rats, neutering can sometimes reduce the aggression, however, if the aggression is brought on from being a solitary animal and high stress levels a neuter may not have the desired effect.

Most of the time it is beneficial to have at least 2 rats to keep each other company while you are at work, school or doing other things. Having a companion helps reduce stress and lower the chance of illness. Many illnesses can be stress related ie. Myco. With a friend your rat will live a much more fulfilling life.

Some rats, due to unknown reasons, will not accept a companion. It is our belief that this occurs with rats that have lived the majority of their lives alone and do not know or understand "rat etiquette" leading to aggression towards their companion(s). These rats generally do well if given enough free range time with their owner. If this type of animal is left to their own devices continually they may start to display undesirable behaviours like those described above.

Some people believe that if they get 2 rats then the animals will no longer want to participate in communicating and playing with their owners. This is UNTRUE, in actual fact most rats that are kept in groups are less fearful and more social than those that live alone.

In most cases, we recommend keeping at least a pair, if not more, of rats. One rat is never enough when you have owned rats for a while. There is a term that people who are owned by rats use, in its shortened form it is called GGMR. Watch out for the GGMR because it is contagious and if you really do love rats then you will catch it.

GGMR stands for Go Get More Rats.

It will not cause you any bodily harm but it can lead to you having to eat less favourable foods so that your newly adopted friends can have all the yummy foods.

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