

Meet the Animal: Fancy Rats

FCMoD's fancy rats (*Rattus norvegicus domestica*) are some of the museum's most charismatic animals, but are they really all that fancy? Learn more about these furry creatures and channel your inner zoologist as you observe animals in your own backyard!



Fancy Rat Life History:

Being a fancy rat simply means that they are domesticated; they are tame animals and common household pets. The word “fancy” means that humans “appreciate or like” them more than the non-domesticated brown rats. What other animals are considered domestic? Do you have pets or farm animals that live with you? What animals do not make good pets?

Physical Characteristics: Rats are mammals and vertebrates. This means they are warm-blooded, have hair or fur, and have a backbone. Fancy rats have a wide range of different colors of fur, unlike wild rats who are usually dark brown (an adaptation to help them blend into their environment). All rats have a long, furless tail that are used for balance when they are climbing and exploring their habitat.

Habitat: Wild rats can live almost anywhere! They are found on all continents except Antarctica. If they are not living in people's homes as pets, they prefer living in damp environments where they can tunnel.

Diet: Rats are omnivores – they'll eat almost anything! In the wild, they eat a mixture of plants and small animals. At FCMoD, our fancy rats eat a bunch of fruits and vegetables. Naturally, they are scavengers who love to seek out food, which is why they like to live around humans – to break into food storage and help themselves!

Fun Facts: Rats are often stereotyped in untrue ways, but they can be affectionate, intelligent and clean. They are highly social animals and at the museum, the rats are all siblings and love to snuggle while they nap!



Backyard Observations: Pets!

Whether it is in your backyard, neighborhood, or at a Natural Area, animals can be observed just about anywhere! Zoologists use science to observe animals and learn about their behaviors and their habitat. You can be a backyard zoologist and observe similar domesticated animals like the museum’s fancy rats and record what you discover!

Supplies:

- Writing utensil
- Paper
- Computer and Internet Access (optional)

Instructions:

1. Create a way to record your animal observations and behaviors. You can write a journal entry or maybe create an observation chart, or use our guiding questions to think deeper about the animals you see!
2. If you have a pet who live with you at home, observe them throughout the day and record what they do. If you have multiple, compare and contrast their behaviors.
3. If you don’t have any pets, take a walk with your family and look for pets, farm animals or other domesticated animals on your walk. You can also visit <https://explore.org/livecams/farm-sanctuary/wisconsin-pasture-farm-sanctuary> to observe farm animals though camera live streams!

Guiding Questions:

<p>Location and Habitat</p> <p><i>Where did you see this animal? What does it's habitat look like?</i></p>	<p>Physical Characteristics</p> <p><i>What does this animal look like, is it small or large? Furry or Scaly?</i></p>	<p>Diet</p> <p><i>Did you see the animal eat? If so what did it eat? If not, what do you think it eats, and why?</i></p>
<p>Locomotion</p> <p><i>How did the animal move? Does it walk, fly or swim? How many legs did it have? Is it fast or slow?</i></p>	<p>Vocalization</p> <p><i>Did the animal make any noises? What did they sound like? Why do you think they made those noises?</i></p>	<p>Other Behaviors</p> <p><i>What was the animal doing when you observed it? Did it hang around other animals? What types of adaptations does the animal have?</i></p>