Allotments AGM 2019 Rats

We have a rat problem. Many of you may have seen them or signs of their activity. Many of you may have had your produce eaten by them.

Over the Autumn I removed a total of 13 rats from the allotments. I now have a total of 9 rat traps. 4 live traps purchased by us jointly, one live trap kindly donated and four others I purchased myself. I know that at least one other plot holder has put down traps and helped reduce the rat population. This has helped but has not removed the rat problem. Part of my problem in catching these rats is that there is no where secure on site to store the traps and my car was previously owned by a vet. Rats are very sensitive to odour, quite intelligent and wary of new things and human smell. I think the rats can smell the residual vet smell in my car despite the amounts of manure and wood chips I’ve transported in it.

This is not now an issue limited to us alone. One plot holder contacted Meopham Parish Council direct about the rats, perhaps unaware of the work that has already been done and is being done. Meopham Parish Council have in response asked us what we are doing to reduce the rat problem under the terms of our tenancy.

Over the past 6 months or so I have contacted Gravesham Borough Councils Vermin contractor a number of times via the contact details given on their website. I have not yet had a reply. My efforts had some limited success but not enough to make a significant reduction.

Recently a plot holder who carries out vermin control on neighbouring farms has offered to help us with this problem. This work will be carried out at night, the allotments will be locked to prevent access and warning signs will be posted on the two entry gates. Any rats removed will be disposed of appropriately with others on a neighbouring farm.

A trial will be carried out soon when the weather permits. I sincerely hope that this will lead to a significant reduction in the rat population fairly quickly.

While I know that some are not in favour of such action we do have a joint legal responsibility to control “vermin” on our site. They can and do eat the food we work so hard to grow, and they can and do spread diseases that could cause you and your loved ones significant harm either by contact with their urine or by ingesting food that they have weed on. Our landlord requires us to take action.

If you see rat activity on your plot, especially if you have rats nesting and breeding on your plot you have a duty under the terms of your tenancy agreement (nuisance to other plot holders) to do something about it. I am happy for my mobile phone number to be provided (07584 040259) so that you can report rat activity direct to me, ideally via text. Just let me know the plot involved, what you’ve seen and where on the plot it is. For example, Plot 200e, suspected rat’s nest, under compost heap. If you see a trap on your plot please do not touch it as rats are very sensitive to the smell of humans and then won’t approach it. You may not see traps when they are set out as some are camouflaged and some may be put down and taken up again before you see them.

You can put down rat traps yourself, though I would urge you not to put down rat poison as this carries risks to you and other wild life and is best carried out if at all by a professional vermin control contractor who will be more aware of potential risks of use and what the local rat population is resistant to.

You should report any suspected rat’s nest, hole or borrow to the committee. I noted rat’s nests in some plots over the winter where the plot holder had either not given or specifically denied permission for me to go onto their plot to do something about it. This is not a situation that can really be allowed to continue. For everyone’s safety and health rats in future will be dealt with wherever they are found.

Thank you for your cooperation. Any questions?

Mark Hill