



Medlock Place Historic District

**Medlock Place
Neighborhood Association**
315 West Georgia, Phoenix, AZ 85013

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The Medlock Pages

Roof Rat Special Issue Editor:

Lynn Morrow

Neighborhood Wide Response Necessary To Control Infestation

Roof Rats Invade Medlock Place

Several residents have recently reported roof rats in their yards. For the past three years these pests have been infesting neighborhoods throughout the Valley. Until now, no widespread reports of roof rats had surfaced in Medlock Place.

These rats (*rattus rattus*) have a long history as a disease vector.* They also wreak havoc with fruit trees and are known to destroy electrical wiring.



Some Things You Need to Do

- Work together with your neighbors.
- Good environmental management practices, supplemented by the wise use of rodenticides and trapping are the most effective approaches to rat control.
- Harvest fruits as soon as they ripen. Pick up all fallen fruit.
- Never leave uneaten pet food outside overnight.
- Algerian ivy, oleander, bougainvillea, and other thickly matted plants should be thinned and trimmed well away from roofs, walls, fences, utility poles, and trees.
- Store wood and lumber piles on racks at least 18 inches above the ground and 12 inches away from the walls; clean up debris piles.
- Repair leaky faucets and eliminate any other unnecessary standing water.

Best Efforts of County Vector Control Aren't Enough - "Relentless Effort" of the Whole Neighborhood is Required to Get Rid of Roof Rats

Not native to Arizona, roof rats were first discovered in East Phoenix's Arcadia District in 2002. By 2004, the pests had spread to cities and towns all over the Valley.

Roof rats – also commonly known as black rats or ship rats – can grow to 8 inches long (head and body) with a tail even longer. The pest is slender and agile. If given the opportunity, they will enter buildings, and will often use utility lines and fences as runways. Roof rats prefer to feed on fruits, nuts, ivy, and pet food, but will eat nearly anything to survive, including garbage, bird feed, and dog feces.

In the County's early experience with roof rats in Arcadia, they used every tool at their disposal to eradicate the rat problem. They put up over 6,000 bait stations on every telephone pole and tree on public land in Arcadia. The result was dismal. Only about 1 percent of the bait stations were effective.

However, the County found that residents who cleaned up their yards and placed bait stations and traps on their own property were having far more success. Rats are creatures of routine and unless driven to a foreign pole or tree, they prefer to stay in residential backyards.

Eradication of roof rats in any neighborhood is a team effort and requires the relentless effort of the whole neighborhood.

See back page for more information on infestation, control, and educational resources. >

*Rats and their fleas are capable of spreading a variety of diseases to humans, including **bubonic plague** and **murine typhus**. While there have not been any recent reports of plague in Maricopa County, the potential for an outbreak may increase as rat populations expand. **Leptospirosis** may be contracted through contact with water or ingestion of food contaminated with urine of infected rats. **Salmonellosis** is a bacterial food poisoning that may be transmitted when rodents contaminate foods.

“Sounds in the attic are often the first indication of the presence of roof rats . . . At night when the house is quiet the rats may be heard scurrying about.”

LAWRENCE M. SULLIVAN, COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE AND LIFE SCIENCES, UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

Other signs of roof rat infestation are smudge marks from oil and dirt rubbing off their fur as they travel. Look for these smudges between rafters and near fence tops. Because they are often living overhead, between floors or above false ceilings, there is less tendency to see signs of roof rat tracks, urine, and droppings.

In neighborhoods like ours where there are a lot of fruit bearing trees, a good indication of roof rat infestation is desiccated fruit found on the ground (see photo at right).

Voracious Reproduction & Eating Habits

Roof rats reproduce quickly and in our warm climate they reproduce year-round. Females can produce up to 40 pups per year.

Though fond of fruit, roof rats are omnivorous and will feed on snails as well as grain. Ornamental fruit, dates, stored food, birdseed, insects, garbage, and livestock feed are welcome sources of nutrition for roof rats. They will contaminate much more than they eat.

Shy of light and nocturnal feeders, these rats generally begin searching for food shortly after sunset.

Roof rats often hoard considerable amounts of food. Their food hoards may be located in attics, in dense vegetation such as hedges, or in other hiding places near their nests.



Oranges like the ones pictured above – chewed and hollowed – are a positive indication of roof rat infestation. Roof rats may nest in your neighbor’s yard but find food in yours. They will travel several hundred feet in search of food and water. They prefer to nest in secluded areas above ground in attics, crowns of palm trees, dense non-deciduous trees and in the upper reaches of wood piles. In hot, dry climates, roof rats may also burrow in the ground. When they do, they use trees, materials stored on the ground, concrete slabs and sidewalks to support shallow burrows.

Indoors or out, roof rats prefer to forage for food above ground in elevated areas.

They travel quickly and easily through trees and along vines, wires, rafters, and rooftops. They often use trees and utility lines in search of food, but can also be found foraging in dense ground cover. Roof rats can swim and may use sewer systems to disperse to new areas.

Rat Population Control & Property Damage Control

Traps and poison baits provide short-term control of roof rats, but eliminating food sources and nesting areas are most effective in eliminating long-term rat infestation. Even slight habitat changes or modifications may cause these rats to move or redirect their activity patterns.

Both short- and long-term roof rat control methods often involve various

safety risks (ladders, tools, toxic materials, etc.). If you are not an enthusiastic do-it-yourselfer, consider hiring the services of a private wildlife or pest control operator.

Whether you hire someone or do some of your own rat control, educate yourself and your family on the habits, dangers, and control of these pests.

Rat Carcass Disposal

To protect human and non-target animal health, pick up and dispose of rodent carcasses as soon as they are discovered.

DO NOT handle dead rodents with your bare hands. Pick up carcasses wearing disposable gloves or by placing a hand inside a plastic bag. The carcass, along with the disposable gloves or plastic bag used to handle the carcass, should be double plastic-bagged and disposed of in secured, outdoor trash containers.

Arm Your Family With These Internet Resources:

ANTI-RAT HABITAT

The single most important thing you can do to fight roof rat infestation is to make your property inhospitable to them. Learn how to rat proof your yard and house with this 6 page guide available online at:

<http://www.ag.arizona.edu/pubs/insects/az1280.pdf>

RAT TRAP

A highly effective trap and poison bait system has been developed by residents of Arcadia. Take advantage of their experience and trap design:

<http://www.roofrat.net>

KNOW A RAT WHEN YOU SEE IT

A great deal of knowledgeable information is available regarding the history and behavior of roof rats in Maricopa County: <http://www.maricopa.gov/envsvc/WATER/VECTOR/roofrats.asp>

Medlock Place Neighborhood Association’s

next Board meeting will be **Tuesday, October 4, 2005.**

A Light Rail presentation is on the agenda.

Mount Calvary Lutheran Church
5105 North 7th Avenue
West Wing Meeting Room

6:30 p.m.

Meetings are regularly held the first Tuesday of each month at 6:30 p.m.



Medlock Place Neighborhood Association dues support our neighborhood’s community efforts! 😊

Your neighborhood association dues are a much needed part of funding neighborhood projects. Annual dues fund publications, safety and aesthetic improvements, and Medlock Place neighborhood events.

Annual dues are only \$25 per year per property or household.
Make checks payable to: MPNA, 112 West Oregon, Phoenix, AZ 85013

Your Name _____
Address _____
Phone _____
Email _____