For further information

For information on the risks of rodenticides to birds of prey, contact:

English Nature
Northminster House
Peterborough PE1 1UA
Tel: 01733 455000

The RSPB
The Lodge
Sandy
Bedfordshire SG19 2DL
Tel: 01767 680551

The Zoological Society of London
Regents Park
London NW1 4RY
Tel: 020 7449 6671

If you find wildlife that you suspect has been poisoned by pesticides, contact the **Wildlife Incidents Investigation Scheme** on freephone – 0800 321 600.

For information on rodenticides resistance, contact:

Rodenticides Resistance Action Group
1 Gleneagles House
Vernon Gate
South Street
Derby DE1 1UP
Tel: 01332 294288

For advice on training in using rodenticides safely, contact:

British Pest Control Association
1 Gleneagles House
Vernon Gate
South Street
Derby DE1 1UP
Tel: 01332 294288

National Proficiency Tests Council
National Agriculture Centre
Kenilworth
Warwickshire CV8 2LG
Tel: 024 7669 6553

National Farmers' Union
164 Shaftesbury Avenue
London WC2H 8HL
Tel: 020 7331 7200

Central Science Laboratories
www.csl.gov.uk

For information on approved rodenticides, see the latest *Pesticides Manual*, published by the British Crop Protection Council, or visit the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) website at **www.hse.gov.uk/hthdir/noframes/bpau.htm** – also accessible via the Pesticides Safety Directorate website at **www.pesticides.gov.uk**. Call the HSE infoline on 08701 545500 for further advice on rodenticides.

Further advice on using rodenticides safely is available in the following leaflets:
Guidelines for the safe use of anticoagulant rodenticides by professional users: British Pest Control Association (2001)

Safe use of rodenticides on farms and holdings: HSE information sheet No 31 (1999)

Rodent control in agriculture – a guide: Home Grown Cereals Authority 2002 (price £25, free to levy payers). Call 020 7520 3920 to order.

Control of rats with rodenticides: a complete guide for best practice. Details available at www.csl.gov.uk

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Front cover photo: red kite by C Gomersall (rspb-images.com)

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for birds
for people
for ever

ENGLISH NATURE

Rat poison and the threat to birds of prey

Summary

1. Prevention of rodents is better than cure. Maintain a clean site to limit sources of rodent food and shelter, and proof buildings to prevent rodent access.
2. Consider using alternative methods of control to anticoagulant rodenticides, such as trapping. Or, if resistance is not thought to be present in local rat populations, consider using one of the anticoagulant rodenticides that poses less of a risk to birds of prey.
3. Ensure that you are trained in using rodenticides before embarking on this method of control. Seek professional advice if necessary.
4. Always follow product label instructions. In particular, ensure that bait is presented correctly, remove bait after use and search for rodent bodies so that they can be disposed of safely.

Roger Wilmshurst (RSPB Images)

Red kite

Introduction

The products used to control rodents are known as rodenticides. The newer 'second-generation' anticoagulant rodenticides are based on one of four active ingredients: bromadiolone, difenacoum, flocoumafen and brodifacoum. As well as being toxic to wildlife, rodenticides can persist in the bodies of rodents and non-target wildlife.

The red kite is just one of the species known to be vulnerable to rodenticides – it is primarily a scavenger and will eat poisoned animals that die out in the open. Birds from the reintroduction projects in England and Scotland have been killed in this way in recent years causing concern to those trying to restore the red kite populations. Other birds of prey, including barn owls, buzzards and kestrels, also at times ingest rodenticides through their prey, as do predatory mammals, such as polecats (left).

Roger Wilmshurst (RSPB Images)

This leaflet gives guidance on how to minimise the risks to birds of prey when undertaking rodent control. Steps should be taken to minimise the risk that vulnerable wildlife will consume rodents that have eaten rodenticides and so suffer secondary poisoning. Rodenticides should only be used as a last resort in areas where vulnerable wildlife is present. In areas where rodents have not developed resistance, older products such as those based on warfarin, coumatetralyl, chlorophacinone or diphacinone are thought to pose a lower risk to birds of prey, as do alternative forms of control such as trapping. These chemicals are subject to review under the EU Biocides Directive in 2004.

Minimising the risk of rodent infestation

Prevention is better than cure.

Take the following **precautions** in order to **avoid** encouraging **rodents** onto your property:

1. Clean up spills of foodstuffs, rubbish and debris close to buildings so that rodents do not have a ready source of food next to shelter.
2. Keep foodstuffs and refuse sealed in rodent-proof containers.
3. Proof buildings to stop rodents getting in.
4. Use gloss paint on outside walls to prevent climbing by rodents (a 15 cm wide continuous strip painted 60 cm up on brick or smooth rendering should be effective).
5. Cover windows and other openings with 6 mm wire mesh or similar to prevent young mice from entering buildings*.
6. Prevent gnawing at the bottom of doors by fitting metal 'kick plates'.
7. Fit circular metal guards around pipes.
8. Trim trees and overhanging vegetation.
9. Consider trying to attract predators to your property to help keep rodent numbers down. Contact conservation organisations, such as your local Wildlife Trust, the Hawk and Owl Trust or the RSPB, for more information.

* Certain bird species, including the swallow and barn owl, regularly breed inside farm buildings and it is important to avoid measures that restrict their access to breeding sites.

George McCarthy (RSPB Images)

Dead barn owl

Ian Carter (English Nature)

Rat poison and the threat to birds of prey

Mark Hamblin (rspb-images.com)

Kestrel

Frederic Desmette (rspb-images.com)

Barn owls

Ray Kennedy (rspb-images.com)

Buzzard

Controlling rodents

If rodent infestation requires control, there are various options, including tackling the problem yourself, or bringing in either the local authority or a private pest-control company.

Tackling a major infestation without expert help can be difficult. There are many alternative forms of control available, including trapping and a wide variety of different rodenticide baits. Using a control method that is inappropriate to the situation can result in poor control and make subsequent attempts at control more difficult. For example, in some areas there is resistance to one or more of the rodenticide baits available. Using rodenticide baits incorrectly increases the risk that other wildlife will be adversely affected, either by eating the bait or affected rodents.

When trapping, use a trap designed for the specific rodent species. The law requires all traps to be placed under cover to prevent birds from being trapped. Rodents prefer to run along the edges of open cover and so placing traps against walls or other hard features is recommended.


Ernie Janes (rspb-images.com)

Using rodenticides safely

Carefully read the product label and ensure that you fully comply with the instructions. If in doubt, contact the manufacturer for clarification.


Dead buzzard by Guy Shorrock (RSPB)

If you are using a rodenticide as part of your work, it is a legal requirement that you are adequately trained and competent to use the product correctly. All anticoagulants must be used safely. Seek training and guidance even for 'amateur' products as this will help to improve control techniques and minimise the risk to other wildlife. Various bodies organise training courses. Contact a pest control company or rodenticide manufacturer for more information, or see addresses at the back of this leaflet.

Minimise the risk of poisoning wildlife. In particular:

1. **Survey the site for centres of infestation, including runs and feeding areas, both before and during treatments.**
2. **Where birds of prey (especially red kites) are present, consider using control methods other than anticoagulant rodenticides (see points 1 and 2 in the 'Summary').**
3. **When using anticoagulant rodenticides, consider your choice of product carefully. In areas where there is no evidence that rats have developed resistance, 'first-generation' rodenticides such as warfarin, coumatetralyl or chlorophacinone are thought to pose a lower risk to birds of prey.**
4. **Where advice indicates that rats have developed resistance to second-generation products, avoid all anticoagulants and seek expert help.**
5. **Use rodenticide baits for only as long as is necessary to achieve satisfactory control. Remove all toxic bait at the end of the treatment period – if a bait box is not used, use trays to facilitate bait removal. Consider the use of non-toxic grain or indicator blocks to check for the reappearance of rats once baits have been removed.**
6. **Bait must by law be sufficiently protected to avoid accidentally poisoning other mammals and birds. Brodifacoum and flocoumafen may only be used indoors.**
7. **It is essential to carry out regular searches for rodent bodies both during and after the treatment period. Bodies may be found up to several days after eating the bait and may die up to 100 m or more away from the bait site.**
8. **Dispose of rodent bodies by burning or burying, as directed by the product label instructions.**