

Where Do New York City Rats Sleep?

By Paige Towers • May 25, 2016 at 5:16pm

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Searching for the whereabouts of 'Pizza Rat' and his brethren

It was the Youtube video that made subway riders everywhere tuck their pants into their socks. Shot in the dirty depths of the New York City subway last year, "Pizza Rat,"

shows a Twinkiesized vermin heroically dragging a piece of pizza down some stairs, until, spooked by the person hovering with the camera above him, he abandons his loot and scrambles off.

While certainly gaginducing, the 14second scene doesn't seem terribly remarkable at first glance. But as is the case with all videos that reach that unofficial internet gold status, there are a lucky set of elements that line up together to render it highly appealing to the Internet's notoriously simple senses. So appealing, in fact, that we were left wanting to know more about this mysterious rodent connoisseur of pizza. Where does

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he live? Where does he sleep? And could he possibly sleep with a teenytiny teddy bear?

In lieu of the Big Apple's upcoming rodent infestation, we drudged up some details about the waking and resting lives of NYC rats to find out the probable habits of our favorite grubby, little subway worker.

There's no better time to answer these questions. As we're moving from spring into summer — which in NYC means garbagestankseason — there will soon be a brand new scourge of garbageeaters. As the “A record 29,329 rat complaints were made in 2015, records show. At the current pace, that record will be eclipsed this year.” So, in lieu of the Big Apple's upcoming rodent infestation (yay!), we drudged up some details about the waking and resting lives of NYC rats to find out the probable habits of our favorite grubby little subway worker.

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New York Post

reports,

The number of potential ‘Pizza Rats’ in NYC

It’s impossible to accurately estimate the NYC rat population. But according to a Columbia University doctoral student

who used statistical analysis in 2014 to attempt the feat, Pizza Rat likely has about 2 million NYC brethren. Since the human

population of New York City was approximately 8.5 million people as of 2015, that means there is potentially one rat for every four people. Yum.

But that number is drastically changing. In May 2015,

Mayor Bill de Blasio declared a \$3 million “rat removal” plan

and things are looking grim for the internet’s favorite sliceloving

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vermin: In some neighborhoods, rat populations have dropped by 90 percent after strategies like baiting and improved garbage cleanup.

So where does Pizza Rat live and sleep?

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The Pizza Rat video retained some of its mysteriousness — whether inadvertently or not — by not revealing who filmed it or in which subway station it was filmed. Thus, we can't know exactly what filthy underground hub Pizza Rat was hanging out in. We can, however, take an educated guess based on where denser populations of NYC's pluckiest little creatures exist.

In 2015, data visualization expert Benjamin E. Myers

released a project titled

“NYC Ratmap.”

The interactive map uses data

collected from 311 reported rat sightings and is automatically updated daily. The map shows relatively few sightings in certain neighborhoods; but in others — particularly in the Bronx, Manhattan's Chinatown, Upper East Side, Upper West Side, and Harlem and Brooklyn's Crown Heights, Bedford Stuyvesant and Brownsville — the map is densely red.

Why the concentration in these areas? According to a 2015 *New Yorker* article, the reasons range from local flora to the number of curbside drains (which provide a water source) to garbage pickup.

The article profiles a wellknown New York City rat expert, Robert Corrigan, who holds a doctorate in urban rodentology from Purdue University. In the article, Corrigan debunks the myth that rats mostly reside in the city's subways, even calling the idea “Hollywoodism” — a label Pizza Rat would probably reject.

Instead, the places that host the largest number of rats are — perhaps surprisingly, perhaps not — the city's parks. Rats are opportunistic survivors and thus regularly keep humans as neighbors, but they achieve the best of both worlds by burrowing underneath urban trees and bushes. (This explains the “NYC Ratmap's” bloodred splotches over parts of the Upper East and Upper West Side, which both border Central Park.) Garbage is also, obviously, a major factor in rats' choice of real estate: If a certain part of the city has inefficient garbage collection or if people simply don't bother to make sure that every piece of trash makes its way into a wellsealed

bag, then that neighborhood had might as well stake a tiny “For Rent” sign into the ground.

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So how did Pizza Rat and his brethren end up in the dystopian cement world of a NYC subway station and not — say — a lovely community garden in the Lower East Side? The subway garbage scene obviously seemed to be up to snuff, but we'll never know of course why Pizza Rat resides where he does, though it does add an extra level of badassdom to his resume.

So, what's Pizza Rat's sleep schedule like?

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Rats, like most rodents, sleep during the day. In fact,

that looked at the sleep habits of albino rats published in the journal, found that rats spend on average 76 percent of daylight hours sleeping. So while we teachers, office workers, baristas, bus drivers and so forth are bustling around from — say — 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., Pizza Rat and his comrades are below ground, resting up for another opportunity to grab a piece of the NYC pie. And whether Pizza Rat rests his head in Manhattan, Queens or Brooklyn, we can estimate one thing with almost 100 percent certainty: this brave little survivalist ain't sleeping there alone.

a study

Physiology & Behavior,

Pizza Rat's home base, is a small dug open area with bedding materials of leaves and ripped up garbage known as a

rat burrow

. It can be reached by (you guessed it) a rat hole, which rats usually dig to be 69 cm in diameter.

There's a ratio of roughly 10 rats to one burrow

, as estimated by the city's health department employees which takes a regular "rat count" (or, as we prefer, "rat census poll") by recording the number of burrows they spot and then multiplying that number by 10.

And rats, just like dogs, are notoriously social animals. Thus, within these hidden, underground areas, they often sleep piled on top of one another — so, envision a litter of puppies, then add long, mottled pink tails to the mix.

According to the founder of — the most comprehensive guide to rat behavior on the internet — burrows are not just for sleep. Rather, they can be full of activity.

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"The Rat Fan Club"

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As the founder, “Debbie the Rat Lady” (who uses this moniker as she prefers to stay anonymous), wrote in an emailed response, “They do tend to sleep most of the day, but they do wake up a few times to relieve themselves, and maybe get a snack or drink.” In addition, when they’re not sleeping rats will groom each other, play together, “clean house,” and, well, perform other activities to ensure the next generation of Pizza Rats.

But not all rats are the same. “Just like humans, different rats have different preferences,” Debbie wrote, “and it can also vary with their mood. For instance, most rats like to sleep in groups, some rats like to sleep alone.”

Furthermore, although most New Yorkers probably expect to see a rat scurrying about around the same time they’re stumbling home from the bar, Debbie says that’s not quite true. “Although rats are often thought of as nocturnal,” Debbie wrote, “they are really more crepuscular, which means they most active at dusk and dawn.” She goes on to say that their energy is highest “from about 10 p.m. to 1 a.m., and maybe again in the wee early morning hours.” This hints at the possibility that Pizza Rat was busy bringing home the grub around midnight, not at some crazy late hour, and then would have scurried back into bed as the sun was coming up.

When will Pizza Rat appear again?

YouTube

When earlier this spring,

news emerged that Pizza Rat was perhaps staged by an artist,

some internet commenters were upset. But whether Pizza Rat is a hoax or not matters little to most New Yorkers: if you regularly ride the subway or walk through the city anytime around or past dusk, you have seen a rat and — and probably at least once, in an incredible show of strength and willfulness — it was dragging something home for supper (or, technically, breakfast).

Pizza Rat represents a larger aspect of NYC life: he's tough, he's resourceful, and he's burning the midnight oil in the city that never sleeps. We can't know exactly where Pizza Rat rests his head at daytime, but we do like to imagine Pizza Rat's underground studio apartment: dark and stinky, but filled with bits of cheese and crust and lots of little roundeared baby Pizza Rats, resting up for tonight's feast.