# Urban rat infestations surge globally amid climate change and waste challenges



City rat infestations have surged dramatically across the UK and internationally, driven by a complex interplay of environmental and human factors. John Gladwin’s unsettling experience of discovering rats inside his Croydon home highlights a growing urban crisis: residents increasingly face the harsh realities and health risks posed by flourishing rodent populations in close quarters.

The rise in rat activity is corroborated by pest control professionals and local authority data. Cleankill, a south England pest control company, reports a remarkable 20% increase in rat-related callouts over the past two years, while the British Pest Control Association (BPCA) confirms that more than half of its members have noted rises in rat infestations nationally in recent years. Official figures obtained by the drainage repair firm Drain Detectives reveal more than half a million rat infestations reported to UK councils between 2023 and mid-2025. London alone recorded over 76,000 infestations in this period, with boroughs such as Camden, Islington, and Brent among the worst affected. Other regions, including the North West of England and Scotland, have also faced tens of thousands of infestations, pointing to a nationwide challenge.

Statistics from local authority pest control services underline the scale of the problem. Councils made close to 300,000 visits to homes across the UK for pest-related issues in 2024, with 91% of these addressing rodent problems. The number of rat or mouse-related callouts increased steadily year on year, with some councils like East Suffolk experiencing rises exceeding 300%. Councils spent an estimated £40 million tackling rodent infestations in 2024, underscoring both the financial and social costs involved. However, pest control provision varies widely, with over a quarter of UK councils not offering such services and significant disparities in fees charged to residents for pest eradication.

Experts point to a constellation of contributing factors. These include reduced frequency of rubbish collections, urban development disrupting sewer systems, and a cultural shift towards fast food and disposable packaging, which provide plentiful, accessible food for rats. Added to these is the effect of climate change. Research led by urban rodentologist Dr Bobby Corrigan, including a study published in Science Advances, has shown that rising temperatures correlate strongly with increased rat activity in cities across North America. Notably, cities experiencing greater temperature increases saw more substantial surges in rat populations, with rises as high as 400% in Washington DC and 300% in San Francisco documented over recent years. Warmer winters reduce rat mortality and increase breeding success, allowing populations to explode, as rats do not hibernate and are prolific breeders.

The biology and behaviour of rats further complicate control efforts. Rats’ inability to vomit and their natural caution in trying new foods makes many poisons ineffective. They quickly learn to avoid baits that cause discomfort, and growing genetic resistance to anticoagulant poisons has been documented. Scientists, including Dr Alan Buckle from the University of Reading, acknowledge the difficulty in developing effective, humane poisons. Consequently, alternative approaches, such as oral contraceptives for population control, are being explored.

Municipalities are responding with innovative measures. New York City appointed Kathleen Corradi as a "Rat Tsar" in 2023, charging her with public education and enforcement efforts. Corradi and her team have introduced “rat walks” to educate residents on how human behaviour influences rat presence and have mandated the use of rat-proof bins to cut off food supplies. This strategy aims to reduce the reliance on poison by removing the sustenance that enables rat populations to thrive. Early results suggest such approaches can have an impact when widely implemented.

Returning to Croydon, the local infestation vividly illustrates the scale of the problem when food sources are plentiful and waste management is inadequate. Pest controllers observe rats boldly scavenging from overflowing bins, making eradication extremely challenging without addressing underlying sanitation issues.

As urban populations grow—with the UK’s population projected to reach 72.5 million by 2032, increasingly concentrated in cities—the convergence of dense human living, climate change, and waste management challenges suggests rat infestations may worsen unless coordinated efforts take hold. Dr Corrigan argues that more than poisons or eradication campaigns, “taking care of our city environment” by cutting off food and shelter for rats offers the most humane and effective long-term solution. However, the scale and complexity of the issue mean that without urgent, sustained action, cities worldwide will continue to grapple with what some call “Ratmageddon.”

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c4gvk397j80o?at_medium=RSS&at_campaign=rss), [[7]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/giant-rat-uk-infestation-mapped-councils-worst-areas-b2802687.html)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c4gvk397j80o?at_medium=RSS&at_campaign=rss), [[2]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/rat-infestations-london-borough-southwark-council-b1241594.html), [[7]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/giant-rat-uk-infestation-mapped-councils-worst-areas-b2802687.html)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.standard.co.uk/business/business-news/local-authority-pest-control-callouts-up-3-over-a-year-b1221450.html), [[4]](https://www.directlinegroup.co.uk/en/news/brand-news/2025/09042025.html), [[6]](https://www.directlinegroup.co.uk/en/news/brand-news/2024/ratflation--743-rodent-infestations-tackled-each-day-in-2023-.html), [[5]](https://nen.press/2023/05/18/ratflation-councils-tackled-618-rodent-infestations-a-day-in-2022/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c4gvk397j80o?at_medium=RSS&at_campaign=rss), [[4]](https://www.directlinegroup.co.uk/en/news/brand-news/2025/09042025.html), [[6]](https://www.directlinegroup.co.uk/en/news/brand-news/2024/ratflation--743-rodent-infestations-tackled-each-day-in-2023-.html)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c4gvk397j80o?at_medium=RSS&at_campaign=rss)
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* Paragraph 8 – [[1]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c4gvk397j80o?at_medium=RSS&at_campaign=rss), [[4]](https://www.directlinegroup.co.uk/en/news/brand-news/2025/09042025.html), [[6]](https://www.directlinegroup.co.uk/en/news/brand-news/2024/ratflation--743-rodent-infestations-tackled-each-day-in-2023-.html)
* Paragraph 9 – [[1]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c4gvk397j80o?at_medium=RSS&at_campaign=rss), [[2]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/rat-infestations-london-borough-southwark-council-b1241594.html), [[7]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/giant-rat-uk-infestation-mapped-councils-worst-areas-b2802687.html)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c4gvk397j80o?at_medium=RSS&at_campaign=rss> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/rat-infestations-london-borough-southwark-council-b1241594.html> - An article from The Standard reports that Camden, Islington, and Brent borough councils had the highest number of rat infestations reported in London from 2023 to mid-2025, according to data obtained through Freedom of Information (FOI) requests. Camden had the highest report, with 9,133 rat infestations during the period, followed by 6,567 in Islington and 6,523 in Brent. Drainage company Drain Detectives submitted FOI requests to borough councils, revealing 76,507 rat infestations were reported between 2023 to mid-2025 across London. The top ten boroughs with the highest reported rat infestations are listed in the article.
3. <https://www.standard.co.uk/business/business-news/local-authority-pest-control-callouts-up-3-over-a-year-b1221450.html> - An article from The Standard reports that local authority pest control services were called out to 291,132 homes across the UK last year, up 3% on the year before and an increase of 9% on 2022, figures show. Councils responded to an additional 52 rat or mouse-related call-outs per day last year compared with 2022, Freedom of Information (FoI) requests by Direct Line home insurance found. Bedbug infestations also soared by 35% between 2022 and 2024, while cockroach removal visits increased by 13% over the same period. East Suffolk Council experienced the largest rise in rat or mouse-related call-outs last year, increasing by 325% on the previous year, followed by Eastleigh Borough Council in Hampshire, which saw a rise of 134%.
4. <https://www.directlinegroup.co.uk/en/news/brand-news/2025/09042025.html> - An article from Direct Line Group reports that councils made 291,132 visits to people’s homes to deal with pest infestations in 2024. 91 per cent of these were to tackle rodents. Visits to tackle bed bugs have increased by a third in just two years. A quarter of local authorities (24 per cent) do not provide pest control services. Councils spent £40 million tackling rodent infestations in 2024. 50 people were admitted to hospital in 2023/24 due to rat bites. Local authority pest control services were called out to a staggering 291,132 pest-infested homes across the UK in 2024, the equivalent to one visit every two minutes, reveals new analysis by Direct Line Home Insurance. This is an increase of three per cent compared to 2023 and nine per cent up on 2022.
5. <https://nen.press/2023/05/18/ratflation-councils-tackled-618-rodent-infestations-a-day-in-2022/> - An article from The NEN – North Edinburgh News reports that local authorities dealt with 225,430 residential rodent infestations in 2022, equivalent to 618 per day, according to new research from Direct Line Home Insurance. There has been a significant rise in residential rodent infestations in the last two years, increasing 12 per cent from 201,871 infestations (552 per day) in 2020. The research found that each local authority spent an average of £101,044 dealing with residential rodent infestations. In total, local authorities could be spending an estimated £36 million tackling rodent infestations each year. Almost one in five (19 per cent) local authorities provide pest control services to residents for free. For those households that don’t qualify for discounts, councils typically charged £80 for pest control related services.
6. <https://www.directlinegroup.co.uk/en/news/brand-news/2024/ratflation--743-rodent-infestations-tackled-each-day-in-2023-.html> - An article from Direct Line Group reports that local authority pest controllers made 271,343 visits to homes with rat and mice infestations in 2023, the equivalent to 743 a day, according to new research from Direct Line Home Insurance. Rodents aren’t the only pests plaguing the UK, as 2023 also saw an increase in the number of residential call outs for both cockroaches and bedbugs. Councils experienced a 23 per cent increase in bedbug call outs compared to 2022, from 11,819 visits to 14,587. Call outs for cockroaches also increased by three per cent compared to 2022, from 8,455 to 8,706 visits. The availability of council operated pest control services is a postcode lottery, with services across the UK varying wildly. Only eight per cent of councils who responded provide pest removal services free of charge, whilst the majority require residents to pay a fee that ranges from £10 to £264. Amongst the highest charges were Southwark (£226.98), Kirklees, in Yorkshire (£210) and Oxford City Council (£264). Some councils, including Shetland, Somerset, and Welwyn Hatfield, offer a reduced fee for those on benefits, whilst others impose a flat rate regardless of circumstances. Over 100 (104) of the 397 councils contacted did not provide a pest control service at all, meaning over a quarter (26 per cent) of Britons would be required to use a private contractor to resolve these issues. This includes large local authorities such as Bradford, Middlesbrough, and Chichester councils. The average cost of providing pest control services is around £150k per council (£150,310). For large metropolitan areas the costs are often considerably higher than this, Edinburgh invested £603,602 and Liverpool £630,332 in 2023 on these services. In total across 2022 and 2023, local authorities across the UK spent an estimated £44 million tackling rodent infestations.
7. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/giant-rat-uk-infestation-mapped-councils-worst-areas-b2802687.html> - An article from The Independent reports that more than half a million rat infestations have been reported across the UK in less than three years, new data has revealed. Drainage specialists have said the problem is only getting worse, with the issue now increasingly starting underground – as they issued a warning over potentially fatal health dangers linked to the rodents. Analysis of Freedom of Information (FOI) responses from UK councils showed the country saw 518,240 reported rat infestations from 2023 to mid-2025. Nearly a quarter of these were found to be in London alone, closely followed by the north west of England and Scotland, which recorded almost 95,000 and 70,000 infestations respectively. Stuart McGinn, drainage expert at Drain Detectives, which produced the research, told The Independent there is no single cause behind the regional differences in rat infestations, but he outlined several key factors that do create the perfect conditions in certain areas.