# PETA calls for change in dictionary definition of rat



Animal rights organisation PETA has directed its attention to the Cambridge Dictionary, seeking to amend the definition of the term "rat." The request was made through a letter addressed to the editor of the dictionary, Rachel Fletcher, which was sent on [insert date].

The letter, signed by PETA's Vice President of Programmes Elisa Allen, criticises the current definitions of "rat," which differentiates between its use as an animal and in a colloquial sense. The dictionary defines a rat as "a small rodent, larger than a mouse, that has a long tail and is considered to be harmful," while the informal definition refers to a rat as "an unpleasant person who deceives others or is not loyal."

In her letter, Allen writes, "We're writing on behalf of rats and those who care about them – as well as anyone who appreciates accuracy in language." She requests that the dictionary update the informal definition, arguing it is "not only inaccurate but unfair to rats, who are pleasant, loyal individuals who form strong attachments and loving family bonds." Allen elaborates on the social nature of rats, mentioning their propensity for empathy and their ability to exhibit emotions, even making "chirping sounds strikingly similar to a child's laughter when tickled."

PETA contends that these negative associations can contribute to the abuse of rats, citing practices where they are deemed "pests" and subjected to various forms of cruelty, such as poisoning or use in laboratory tests. Allen states, "Misleading definitions that associate rats with deceit and disloyalty can play a role in their abuse." The organisation positions their request as a means to foster better treatment and understanding of these animals, which they describe as not only intelligent but also capable of a wide range of emotions.

The concerns raised by PETA reflect broader societal perceptions of rats, with Britannica indicating that misconceptions about these animals have contributed to their negative reputations, often being labelled as "filthy and deadly creatures." Furthermore, the notion that rats abandon sinking ships—due to their instinctual behaviour—has lent itself to the colloquial usage of "rat" as a term to describe disloyalty.

In an effort to promote compassion towards such species, the RSPCA recently urged the public to abandon popular misconceptions about rats, particularly in recognition of World Rat Day. The charity highlighted the creatures as "friendly, intelligent and playful animals," advocating for their potential as companions rather than viewing them solely as pests.

This recent endeavour by PETA is not their first initiative aimed at changing public perceptions. Last year, they contacted paint company Farrow and Ball to suggest renaming paint colours associated with animals, arguing that such terminology perpetuates a culture of animal abuse. They proposed alternatives to names like "Dead Salmon" and "Potted Shrimp," suggesting more whimsical themes instead.

PETA's advocacy for a shift in language underscores their commitment to animal rights, aiming to raise awareness and foster a more understanding view of creatures often vilified in society.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/rat> - Corroborates the current definition of 'rat' in the Cambridge Dictionary, highlighting its use as both an animal and a colloquial term for a deceitful person.
* <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/learner-english/rat> - Supports the dual definitions of 'rat' as an animal and as a colloquial term for an unpleasant or dishonest individual.
* <https://www.britannica.com/animal/rat-rodent> - Provides insights into the misconceptions surrounding rats, contributing to their negative reputation as 'filthy and deadly creatures.'
* <https://www.rspca.org.uk/whatwedo/latest/currentcampaigns/rats> - Illustrates the RSPCA's efforts to change public perceptions of rats by highlighting their friendly, intelligent, and playful nature.
* <https://www.peta.org.uk/blog/animal-symbols-paint-names/> - Supports PETA's history of advocating for language changes to improve public perceptions of animals, such as suggesting alternative paint color names.