



Jacksonville ranks among top cities infested by roof rats

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JACKSONVILLE, Fla. - Just in time for Halloween, Jacksonville has made a list that might make your skin crawl.

The city ranks No. 14 in the nation when it comes to roof rat infestations, joining three other Florida cities that earned this unwanted distinction -- Miami (No. 3), Fort Myers (No. 5) and Tampa (No. 7).

Pest-control company Terminix released those rankings Monday, which have Savannah as the most infested city all the way down to San Antonio, which rounded out the top 15.

The company says it formed that list based on service data gleaned from more than 300 of its branches across the country from Jan. 1 to Oct. 1.

The roof rat, a rodent known for its long, scaly tail and for making a ruckus in the attics of unsuspecting homeowners, tends to invade homes during the fall as outdoor food supplies dwindle.

"They can cause so many diseases. They leave so many things in their fecal matter and saliva and urine," said Tyler Stovall, an exterminator with Truly Nolen, in Jacksonville. "They usually come in through the attic, the soffits. If you've ever had trees touching the roof, that's a really bad conducive condition because they pretty much got a highway right to the roof."

Stovall told News4Jax on Monday that the Jacksonville area "absolutely" has a roof rat problem.

"Pretty much every area I've worked in, from Ponte Vedra to the Northside of Jacksonville, the issue is just about everywhere," he said.

Terminix has some tips for homeowners looking to keep these pests out:

- Ensure that all firewood, debris and piles of stone or brick are kept as far from the foundation of the home as possible.

- Seal any holes or cracks larger than a quarter-inch, to help prevent rodents from squeezing their way in.
- Install thick weather stripping along the bottom of doors, which will help ensure only guests and an autumn breeze can enter through the front door.
- Work with a qualified pest management professional to determine potential problem areas in your home, which can help to prevent pest challenges before they start.

Stovall said roof rats are a huge factor in house fires. They contribute by destroying insulation and chewing through wires in the attic.

He added that getting rid of the problem can take a lot of time.

"Honestly, on an average, maybe about two months. I've seen it go about six months and we're still catching rats. You know, we've pulled 30 or 50 or 70 rats out of the home," he said.

Roof rats can be just about anywhere, and some people have found they have problems since the recent hurricanes.

Part of the issue with roof rats is their ability to squeeze into almost any opening and then infest homes.

Additionally, a small rat problem doesn't stay small for long. Rats have six to eight pups in a litter, and they reproduce in just 14 to 21 days.