



## Rats plague neighbors in West Yarmouth

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By Madeleine List

Posted Dec 10, 2017 at 4:55 PM Updated Dec 11, 2017 at 6:17 AM



WEST YARMOUTH — Around 2 a.m. on Thanksgiving, Katie Robison woke to a scratching sound coming from inside her house.

“It was so loud that it woke me up, and I could not get back to sleep,” said the Iroquois Boulevard resident. “I was actually emailing (my landlord) at 2 in the morning saying, ‘I’m laying here in bed awake listening to a rodent scratch, and I’m terrified.’”

Since May, Robison and her neighbors in the otherwise quiet West Yarmouth neighborhood have been complaining about a rat issue they say stems from one home at 15 Nauset Lane.

The tenant there, Judith Adelchi, has been providing food and water to the rats and hasn’t stopped, despite a cease-and-desist order from the Yarmouth Health Department in June, according to health department and court records. In November, the town filed a criminal

complaint against the owner of the property, Mark Pallatino, for failing to stop his tenant, who is also his cousin, from feeding the critters.

“Although Mr. Pallatino had hired an exterminator to exterminate the rats, Mr. Pallatino has not stopped (Adelchi) from continuing to feed the rats and provide them with water,” according to the criminal complaint. “As a result, despite the exterminator’s efforts, the number of rats on the property appears to be growing.”

Pallatino is scheduled to be arraigned in Barnstable District Court on Jan. 3 on three counts of municipal ordinance or bylaw violation.

Neighbors have reported seeing rats and burrow-holes on their properties, increased bird activity in the area and bowls of food and water on the ground in the yard of 15 Nauset Lane, according to health department records.

Robison, who moved into the house kitty-corner from 15 Nauset Lane on May 27, said she and her landlord, Thomas Sheehan, have tried everything to keep the rats off the property. Sheehan has hired exterminators multiple times, and Robison says she keeps the house and yard clean, doesn’t put out bird feeders and stores her trash in a closed bin.

But the rats keep coming.

“It’s just awful,” she said. “And I’m scared to death. They’re huge disease carriers.”

A woman who answered the door at 15 Nauset Lane yelled insults at a reporter and declined to comment for this story.

Pallatino, who lives in Springfield, said he’s told Adelchi to take down her bird feeders and stop feeding the wildlife, but he understands why it’s difficult for her.

“She’s an elderly, disabled person,” he said. “She’s as lonely as lonely can get. Her enjoyment is looking out in her backyard.”

Plus, Adelchi shouldn’t bear all of the blame for the rat infestation in her neighborhood, Pallatino said.

“Cape Cod has a rat problem, period,” he said. “They’re always going to be by the ocean.”

Health directors on the Cape say they have seen an increase the rat population in recent years, resulting in more complaints from residents in their towns.

Last year, the Mashpee Health Department received around 15 to 20 rodent-related complaints from residential areas, when it typically receives fewer than 10 in a year, said Mashpee Health Agent Glen Harrington.

The milder winters and reduction in the numbers of coyotes and foxes, which are natural predators for rats, has allowed the rat population to grow, said Sandwich Health Director David

Mason. Year-round bird feeders and backyard chicken coops also play major roles in attracting rats to residential areas, he said.

“Rats are very lazy, and they live very close to food sources,” he said. “The bird feeders allow food to be readily available. Any type of source of regular food has created the problem.”

The situation has improved in both towns, thanks to efforts to educate the public about how to avoid a rat infestation through publications on Facebook and town websites.

“I think people have been seeing the media attention and our notices,” Harrington said. “The complaints have actually decreased since last year.”

But in the meantime, Robison said she doesn’t feel comfortable sitting in her backyard or letting her dogs play off-leash for fear they’ll come into contact with a disease-carrying rat. While she previously thought she might purchase the Iroquois Boulevard home someday, she now says she’s looking for another place to live.

“It’s just a real shame that this woman’s ignorance and reluctance to stop feeding these critters has disrupted and just turned upside down so many lives,” she said. “It’s so selfish on her part.”

Just like the neighbors of 15 Nauset Lane, Pallatino said he wants this issue resolved. He’s hired exterminators and built a fence around his property and says he is just as frustrated as anyone that the problem continues.

“What do you want me to do? Do you want me to stand out there with a gun and shoot them?” he said of the rats. “I’d much rather be doing something else than worrying about this crap.”