Rat Hunting with Ferret, Dog, Hawk and Gun

S Frain (2005). Published by The Crowood Press, Crowood Lane, Ramsbury, Marlborough, Wiltshire SN8 2HR, UK. 144 pp Hardback. (ISBN 1 86126 741 X). Price £14.99.

This is a practical handbook on rat hunting both for sport and as a means of pest control. It is based on 25 years of experience, is easy to read and is profusely illustrated with drawings and photos. A wealth of anecdotes link theory to reality, and having had many ratting forays during my country childhood, my own experiences tally closely with those described in this book.

It is not the normal kind of book you would expect to see reviewed in this Journal, being completely non-academic and down-to-earth. If you read it, you will get a good idea of *how* rats are hunted, but to understand *why* people hunt rats you have to actually try it. And that brings us up short against our own very ambivalent views and applications of welfare standards to animals. On the one hand, the rat is a pampered laboratory animal with whole manuals written about its management and with the five 'freedoms' to cater for its welfare. On the other hand, the wild rat is 'Public Enemy Number One', to be killed by any means possible. How many people, on finding a rat in their kitchen, have any other reaction than 'Get rid of it NOW!' All of our pious thoughts about animal welfare go out of the window when confronted with the reality of a wild rat at close quarters. The British Government license rat poisons that are known to be inhumane and we use rat-traps that would be banned if used for fur-bearing animals. We treat some laboratory animals better than we do many children, yet any standard of treatment appears to be 'acceptable' in our war against the wild rat.

Sean Frain takes a middle way through all this. Right from the start he rails against the use of poisons that cause a lingering death. Because he is hunting for sport he is not constrained by the need for 'cost-effectiveness', as are commercial or municipal pest controllers. His hunting is heavily reliant on the use of terriers, which usually kill a rat in one bite; therefore, death is both swift and certain. Only when rats are shot is there a risk of wounding, but with dogs in attendance most of these are dealt with quickly. When he has finished, his rats are either lined-up dead, or are still alive and unharmed; he does not charge farmers for his services because he hunts for sport. His activities are a small-scale operation, often clearing rats from free-range chicken runs and piggeries. In these places a poisoning campaign risks killing either the pigs themselves or non-target organisms, such as scavenging birds of prey.

Sean Frain gives a useful outline of the role of the black rat as a vector of the Plague, which devastated Europe, and of how the brown rat has come to replace its smaller relative. He also describes some of the diseases, such as the dreaded Weil's disease, which are carried by rats, even in their urine. If you have ever suffered from the long-term effects of a rat bite, as I have, you will have no compunction at all over the need to keep rat numbers down.

The wild rat, of course, has only one 'freedom' — real freedom. Its quality of life and death is therefore very variable. Frain makes the interesting point that rats in towns tend to be smaller and in poorer condition than country rats. Rats have a great ability to respond to increases in food supply, rapidly increasing in number until food or space becomes limiting and bodily condition falls. In the absence of external controls, starvation and infanticide lower the numbers again. How then do we set our benchmarks of acceptability in how we manage live rats and in how we kill rats? Should we take our standards from what is natural, or from something else? Should we apply different standards for killing laboratory rats and for killing wild rats? Is it more acceptable for us to pay someone to poison rats rather than to allow someone to hunt rats free of charge because he enjoys rat-hunting? Is it better for someone to use a cat to kill rats (and not enjoy it) or for someone to use a dog to kill rats for sport? Should animal welfare have priority over other management decisions? Are our own views on all this more valid than Mr Frain's? Is welfare legislation realistically enforceable in the countryside?

Frain's book is a straightforward practical little book and the people who use it most will also have a no-nonsense approach. Perhaps of all the species, the rat makes us think long and hard on where we stand on animal welfare issues.

Nick Fox

International Wildlife Consultants Ltd, UK

Urban Aquaculture

Edited by B Costa-Pierce, A Desbonnet, P Edwards and D Baker (2005). Published by CABI Publishing, Nosworthy Way, Wallingford, Oxfordshire OX10 8DE, UK. 304 pp Hardback (ISBN 0 85199 829 1). Price £65.00.

This eagerly awaited text covers a subject that, in terms of past publications and research, has been overshadowed by the volume of literature on urban agriculture and its role in the future of increasingly expanding urban metropolises — particularly in the developing countries of Asia and Africa. As such, *Urban Aquaculture* provides a thought-provoking historical and current overview, through a number of case studies, of peri-urban aquatic production systems in Asia, Europe and North America, highlighting their various constraints and benefits while also looking to their future. One of the key concepts throughout the different articles is the increasing legacy of urban population growth in this new century, producing vast volumes of waste water that many of the authors believe cannot be economically treated using existing capital intensive treatment technologies. The result in many of the coastal cities of southern Asia and Africa is the increasing pollution and degradation of coastal ecosystems as the majority of urban waste water flows directly untreated into the surrounding marine environment — a slow-fuse time-bomb waiting to go off. With