



Ravenous rats driven into the open

By Janet Maitland

It's not quite a plague but East Finchley residents have reported seeing a growing number of rats in their gardens over the last few weeks. "I've never seen a rat in my garden before," said one horrified homeowner. "It was huge."

British Pest Control Association has seen a 51% rise in rat call-outs since March and Rentokil has noted an 80% increase in visits to its website compared to this time last year.



With restaurant waste bins standing empty for months and less takeaway food discarded on the streets, the rats that live around us are foraging in our gardens for alternative food sources. They're also digging holes to make nests.

Cannibalism

Rats are normally nocturnal animals that we rarely see, but they're now so hungry they're out in daylight. Some pest controllers in the UK have reported householders unable to cook on their barbecues as hungry rats are swarming round their ankles. There are also reports of rats getting indoors; in one case, a rat was eventually found hiding under a cot pillow.

Starvation has even driven some to cannibalism. Steve Belmain, professor of ecology at the Natural Resources Institute in Kent and a leading expert on rats, said we should not be surprised by this as cannibalism is common among starving

mammals. He is also confident that as soon as restaurants are opened, the rats will return to their old habitats. "They'll get back to normal, probably, before we do," he said.

Advice to householders

In the meantime, don't leave your back door open unless you are in the room. Clear up spilled food from the ground by barbecues and under bird tables and feeders. A compost heap scattered with discarded vegetable material is like a salad bar to a starving rat, so keep it enclosed.

A Barnet Council spokesperson told us that if you see rats in your own garden you should arrange pest control treatment. If rats are in another private property you can contact Environmental Health on 020 8259 7997.

Reassuringly, they added that they received seven rodent reports from East Finchley during June, which is "normal for the time of year".

The anti-plastic fight goes on

Ann Inglis updates us on the latest news from the No2PlasticsN2 campaign group.

The threat of a ban of plastic straws and plastic stirrers in April (Covid-19 now delaying the ban until October) meant that in March none could be found at any café on the High Road in East Finchley. Congratulations to all eight establishments!

Most of the world's land surface is in countries where single-use plastic bags are banned; why can't we join them? The time to act is now, particularly with the Environment Bill going through Parliament as I write.

Our message to Parliament

No2PlasticsN2 submitted evidence to the Parliamentary committee. We quoted shop managers and owners telling us they want single-use plastic bags banned so that trading conditions will be the same for all shops, and parents telling us they want schools banned

from selling water in single-use plastic bottles.

We believe that every school child must have a reusable water bottle as basic school equipment. Most schools have any number of fountains and more and more shops are becoming part of the London-wide REFILL scheme.

Way forward

In this time of Covid-19 everyone feels anxious and fearful for their security and future. It's difficult to see any way forward but as a campaign group we will be keeping our wheels turning. We've achieved so much in our first year that it would be tragic if our efforts to give N2 residents the opportunity to live plastic-free lives were to go to waste. Virus or no virus, old plastic never dies; it just keeps building up and up. We will just have to clean up more of it, and stop exporting our problem!

Letters

Another beautiful cat

Dear Editor,
Picking up on your article on the Savannah cat spotted in East Finchley in your July edition, I was in my back garden when out of the corner of my right eye I detected movement. On turning, I saw this cat, pictured, coming in from the front garden.

At first I thought it was that same Savannah cat. However, on looking closer, the spots were more like a leopard. It looked at me, wasn't fazed by me at all and carried on looking for something in the shrubbery. Then a young fox came into the garden. The cat saw the fox and went into what I can only describe as hunting mode. The fox took off as fast as it could and the cat streaked after it. I didn't see either again.

The cat was about one and a half times to twice the size of a normal cat. Pretty sure it is a Bengal Cat, bred from an Asiatic Leopard Cat and a domestic cat.

Richard Baldwin
High Road, N2.

Bunker next door

Dear Editor,
I see that Roz Davy has a question about whether there are bunkers in the area ('There's a bunker in my garden... or is there?' *The Archer*, July 2020). In our neighbours' garden in Howard Walk, N2, behind our rear fence, is a concrete bomb shelter so there are other bomb shelters in the area.

Mike Ruttenberg
Heath View, N2

Open libraries

Dear Editor,
One of the most important things that Barnet Council can do is to reopen libraries, not for borrowing but for computer use, which is so important these days. Church End, which is large and spacious so that safe distancing could be observed and numbers kept to a minimum, would be ideal for this and its renewed use would be most welcome.

John McPartlin,
Creighton Avenue, N2.

Social media help

Could you be the one to help us maintain our social media presence (our wonderful Jess is off to university)? We will be keeping up the lobbying (after the Commons, on to the Lords) and building the website. For offers of help with our social media or for gripes about plastic, contact us at no2plastics@gmail.com or via No2PlasticsN2 on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram.

East Finchley Baptist Church
Due to the Covid-19 virus our face to face services and meetings have been suspended until further notice but please go to our website for details of online services and meetings.
For more information please contact the Church Office
Email: office@eastfinchleybc.org.uk
www.eastfinchleybc.org.uk



Thanks to our pharmacies

Dear Editor,
Regarding the letter from Paresh Shah thanking us his customers (*The Archer*, June 2020), it should have been us thanking him and all his staff for looking after us and dispensing prescriptions and offering advice in their usual caring and efficient way. Once the lockdown comes to an end I for one will purchase toiletries, tissues, toothpaste etc from CW Andrews rather than in supermarkets. It is essential we keep pharmacies in our high streets. Thank you, Paresh and staff, from one grateful East Finchley resident.

Pauline Delius,
Abbots Gardens, N2.

Rubbish behaviour

Dear Editor,
As lockdown peters out, the amount of litter appears to be increasing. It's not only the discarded gloves and disposable face masks left in the streets but our local park is suffering too.

How can someone eat and drink in Cherry Tree Wood and think it acceptable to leave cans and wrappers underneath the bench they have been sitting on, with a litter bin only a short distance away? Why do some people sit drinking under a tree in the wood, then leave all the containers along with the plastic carrier bags they came in scattered around?

Probably even worse is the increase in dog poo both in the grass and on the paths. There are bins to put this in, if dog owners/walkers bother to bring a suitable bag for it.

This sort of behaviour is unacceptable, particularly at a time when we are being encouraged to be kind to one another. There are those kind locals who do go round picking up other people's litter. What a pity there is a need, but thanks to all who do this.

L C Ward,
(Address supplied).

Send your correspondence to: "Letters Page" The Archer, PO Box 3699, London N2 2DE or e-mail news@the-archer.co.uk

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Isolation inspiration

Dear Editor,
I live in sheltered accommodation in Wilmot Close and am currently self-isolating. I am aged 81 and to keep myself busy I decided to write a poem about our situation. I have never written a poem before and, as a first attempt, I didn't know when to stop! It's rather long but I thought it might bring a smile to people's faces.

Lockdown in springtime

The sun is shining, spring's on its way,
Oh what a beautiful, glorious day.
Flowers in bloom show their face to the sun,
It's all so uplifting for everyone

But hey, just a minute, we're not allowed out,
Coronavirus is lurking about.
It's deadly and serious and unknown to man
So we've all got to do as much as we can.
We've just got to stop it from spreading so fast
But what can we do, how long will it last?

No trips to the country, no walks in the park,
No hugging and kissing, keep metres apart
But we must obey rules to keep ourselves safe
So 'Just stay at home', perhaps bake a cake,
Read a good book or just watch the telly,
Have lots of chocolate, ice cream and jelly.
Try to keep smiling, healthy and fit
Because none of us wants to go down with this.

Thank God for the doctors and nurses, I say,
Who battle and fight for us by night and by day.
If they're all doing so much for us
We've got to help them to stop this virus.

Thank goodness too for the phone and the wifi,
Without which we'd never get by,
To talk to our families, neighbours and friends
To keep us all close until it all ends.

So when it's all over, we must celebrate.
We're in this together, so don't hesitate.
Just let your hair down and let's have a ball
And shout a 'BIG THANK YOU' to one and to all.

Wendy Hughes,
Wilmot Close, N2.