

HOW RATS USE HARBOUR AGE AREAS

Rats use harbourage areas to provide food and shelter once the cane crop is harvested. To protect themselves from attack by owls and other predators, rats live in areas with a thick grass and weed cover.

BSES scientists plot rat activity throughout an average year as follows:

March-June	Rats are present in crop pre-harvest.
June-December	Harvesting occurs, rats are left unprotected from attack by their natural predators (ie owls, kites, etc) and have no food supply.
June-December	Rats move to the nearest area that will offer them protection and food, commonly grassy drains and creek banks.
November-February	Weed seed is necessary for initiating and maintaining breeding by rats. Rat populations on cane farms will only increase if crops are weedy or if the rats have access to weedy refuges. Rats don't breed when only sugarcane is available.
December-February	Rats breed in harbourage areas and then colonise crop.
March-June	Rats are present in the crop pre-harvest.

Herein lies the theory behind integrated pest management (IPM) for rat control. If you reduce and eventually remove your harbourage areas, it will be very difficult for rats to live and breed on your farm.