



Rachel Fletcher  
Editor  
Cambridge Dictionary

Via e-mail: [cide@cambridge.org](mailto:cide@cambridge.org)

7 April 2025

Dear Ms. Fletcher:

Hello from People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA). We're writing on behalf of rats and those who care about them – as well as anyone who appreciates accuracy in language – to ask that you please update your entry for the informal noun “rat,” currently defined as “*an unpleasant person who deceives others or is not loyal.*”

This is not only inaccurate but unfair to rats, who are pleasant, loyal individuals who form strong attachments and loving family bonds. As altruistic as they are clever, [rats also show empathy](#) and a willingness to help other rats – even when they don't know the individual in peril and dream of a better future.

Rats also broker connections with kind humans, grooming and snuggling with their guardians and appreciating reciprocal affection. They even make chirping sounds strikingly similar to a child's laughter when tickled and seek out more tickling. As neuroscientist Jaak Panksepp puts it, rats display “[A] marvellous sense of fun.”

Words matter. They can affect our perception of, and therefore, our behaviour towards others. Misleading definitions that associate rats with deceit and disloyalty can play a role in their abuse. Misconceptions about these sensitive animals see them deemed “pests” and poisoned, killed in guillotine-like traps, or otherwise tormented. For [flawed science](#), they're allowed to be used like inanimate laboratory equipment, shocked, burned, near-drowned, and forced to ingest chemicals before being cruelly killed.

Rats deserve better, and you can help them get it simply by removing derogatory and misleading definitions.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Elisa Allen  
PETA UK Vice President of Programmes

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