



White Footed Mice Not Nice in Homes

By Dawn Pettinelli, UConn Home & Garden Education Center

Living in an old house does have its charms as well as challenges. Come fall, despite attempts at filling and patching every hole or crack we can find, a few white footed mice make their way into the attic. Between traps and our indoor cat, they are usually quickly dispensed with. This year, perhaps because of the abundant rainfall and food, has seen a greater influx of these cute but unwelcome guests and we just caught another one.

White-footed mice as well as deer mice (*Peromyscus* sp.) are very common in Connecticut; in fact they are found along the east coast from Nova Scotia down to Virginia and west to the plains states. These creatures are about 7 inches long including their 2 to 4-inch tail. They weigh from a half ounce to an ounce and a half. Their topsides are covered with a pale to brownish red fur, but their undersides and feet are white. Their ears are rather large and their whiskers rather long.



White footed mouse from www.biokids.umich.edu

White-footed mice live in diverse habitats ranging from wooded areas to fields as well as agricultural or suburban settings. They may nest in burrows, wood or rock piles and with their excellent climbing abilities they can find shelter in tree cavities, old bird nests, bird houses, sheds and residences. They can scamper up almost any vertical roughened surface and squeeze through openings only a quarter inch wide.

In the wild, the life span of a white-footed mouse is about one year. Females can breed at about 44 days old and have 2 to 4 litters per year of 2 to 9 young. In this part of their range, breeding usually occurs from March through October. This species of mice is known for its acute eyesight, hearing and sense of smell.

White-footed mice may collect food over an area ranging from one-third to 4 acres. They are omnivores and feed on a variety of items including seeds, insects (including gypsy moths), acorns, leaves, fruits and snails. Being nocturnal feeders offers them some protection from predators. They serve as a food source for many creatures including hawks, owls, foxes, weasels and snakes. These mice also play a role in spreading beneficial mycorrhizal fungi to tree roots, which helps the roots absorb water and nutrients.

On the negative side, white-footed mice are effective vectors of Lyme disease. The mice may carry the bacteria that is then picked up by black legged ticks when feeding on the mice. This disease can then be transmitted to humans and pets by infected ticks. Other diseases may be carried in their dark, small, rice-shaped droppings. In attics or basements, mice can create nests of flammable natural or artificial materials. They can gnaw on the soy-based insulation used in electrical wiring and cause house fires.

The best way to control white-footed mice in residences would obviously be to prevent them from entering. Examine areas around doors and windows for holes or cracks and seal them up with insulating caulking. This can also be used where the house and foundation meet, around chimneys and any other area that might offer a way into your home.

Once inside, trapping really is the only solution. Take your pick from snap traps to live capture ones. Since white-footed mice are not a rabies-vector species in Connecticut, they could be captured and released. Do note that it is advised to release them at least 2 miles away from your home as they have a good sense of direction and may just head home again.

Multiple traps should be set primarily on the floor next to walls as mice tend to run along walls for safety. Place the trigger part of the trap against the wall. Effective baits include peanut butter, rolled oats, gumdrops, sunflower seeds, nuts, and the like. If possible, spread some bait around un-set traps for a few days to convince them the area is safe, then set the traps. Traps should be checked at least once, if not twice daily. Purchase see-through live capture traps so you can tell if a mouse is in there. Use gloves when setting traps as mice have a keen sense of smell. Also, it is suggested that used traps be soaked in a dilute bleach solution, rinsed and allowed to air dry before reuse.

Dead mice can be double bagged and placed in the trash or perhaps buried in the yard. Poisons are not recommended as the mouse may die in the wall or ceiling and decay. Also, dead or dying mice can be eaten by pets and wildlife with life-threatening consequences.

Numerous repellents have been sold or suggested including ammonia, peppermint oil or dryer sheets. While they might work in some instances, there is no research backing their efficacy.

To catch mice that have entered your home, you must be more persistent than they are. A good indoor cat may be a big help as well. If your efforts are unsuccessful, a pest control operator may need to be called in.

For gardening questions, feel free to contact us, toll-free, at the UConn Home & Garden Education Center at (877) 486-6271, visit our website at www.ladybug.uconn.edu or contact your local Cooperative Extension center.