

## A squeaky adventure

Sometimes, insight arrives as chaos; this is what I have learnt in 2 years working as a researcher in the Himalayan Restoration Project, Chamba. I had a lot of opportunities for amazing wildlife sightings, but I had never imagined that this story would reshape my thoughts about small mammals.

It was just another gloomy evening, amid peak monsoon, when my colleague Sushanth & I were returning from one of our birding adventures. We were discussing the beauty of the Kalij Pheasant, which had bestowed upon us its magical presence and soothing calls. Our conversation was so engaging that we walked past a creature that initially appeared to be a piece of cloth. It was the twitch of the fabric that brought our attention to find out it was not trash but a cute little rodent. Drenched in the rain, the poor creature had been shivering on the roadside for I don't know how long.

Two things came into my mind at that time - should I let nature take care of it, or should I take care of it? Both of us mutually decided that we should not intervene and let the rodent be, and then it struck our mind- it's a wild rodent from the Himalaya, a landscape where small mammals have not been extensively studied at all. Who knows what species it was, for we could clearly tell it did not appear to be a common house rat.

We wrapped it gently in a handkerchief and took it to our field station. As neither of us was expecting a visitor, we were completely clueless



*Rattus pyctoris* (Mousu) posing in the limelight.  
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## HRP-Anecdotes

about how to host our new guest. We found a transparent plastic jar and placed the creature inside. We made some holes for ventilation and gave it a few pieces of bread and grains.

The rat, for sure, might have been confused as to why it was captured and observed by two geeky humans. I think it must have been shy or traumatised or a combination of both because it was very docile, not feeding or moving at all. Heavy downpour followed its arrival, and amid the advent of darkness and rainfall, we decided to extend its stay overnight and release it in the morning. An hour later, our little guest was feeling better, its fur was dried out, and it had nibbled a few bites from the sad piece of bread lying beside it. Despite being a rat, the big, round ears and pink nose made it look very much like 'Jerry' from 'Tom & Jerry', therefore I named him 'Mousu'.

As young researchers, we were very keen on its identification, so we decided to take a few photographs. A cardboard box was arranged and placed on the edge of a table, safely secured using cello tape. I waited patiently with my camera focused in place while my roommate slowly released our supermodel into the cardboard. The next 10 minutes were just a light, camera & photo session for our furry guest. After we were satisfied with the pictures, we escorted Mousu straight to its jar, whose lid had apparently been tightened by my colleague (spoiler alert: it wasn't).

The photographs were immediately sent to our guide, Dr .Sanjay Molur, who is an expert in small mammals. He informed that Mousu was

indeed a rat and most probably represented the species *Rattus pyctoris* based on the photographs and approximate measurements provided.

Commonly known as the Himalayan Rat, a species native to central and southeastern Asia, is presently distributed in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China (Yunnan, Guangdong, Sichuan), India, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, ranging from 1,200 to 4,250 m (Corbet & Hill 1992). Although it's listed as least concern on the IUCN Red List, Mousu's species still faces a lot of threats, including habitat loss and continuing decline of mature individuals (Smith & Johnston 2016).

I don't know if it was the limelight, attention or the stress for poor Mousu, but his eyes were determined to take revenge. Just after having another meal of bread & grains, Mousu bit open the lid of the plastic jar and stretched his tiny paws into independence. For all it could find was a house full of endless options to explore, and he went off for his adventure. The open lid caught my attention and sparked chaos, a free rodent in a home full of electronics, wires, clothes, cardboards, edibles, all nibbleable items for a rat. As my colleague and I searched the whole house like freaks, we heard faint little squeaks coming from the kitchen. Apparently, Mousu might have been on a gluten-free diet and had fixed himself with a healthier dinner, as we found him nibbling on an apple peel.

For three hours, we chased the poor creature while it stayed thoroughly traumatised. I hadn't

realised my colleague was terrified of rodents—he jumped every time Mousu ran. The night turned into a mix of laughter, chaos, and our failed attempts to catch one tiny rat.

Finally, we cornered the rat in the kitchen, and my colleague came up with a brilliant idea of catching the rat with his bare hands, but he let his fears get the best of him, and he insisted, “You do it!” and then said “wait” as he ran off to the hall. He came back with a pair of his stinky socks straight from the laundry bag, fully convinced that wearing them on my hands would somehow stop the rat from biting me.

We laughed like maniacs, and the socks smelled so much that I am sure Mousu would have been disgusted as well. Maybe that’s why I was able to finally catch it and place it in a sturdier jar. The next morning, the first thing we did was to release Mousu back to the place we got it from, and I hope he continues to live happily.

Somewhere between the chaos and the laughter, I caught myself rethinking everything about rodents in general. Like many others, I had always seen rats as a menace, but this

incident made me pause and wonder how these small mammals quietly hold ecosystems together—dispersing seeds, feeding predators, reshaping habitats through burrowing, and keeping nutrient cycles alive. It is very sad how often the smallest creatures are misunderstood and treated as vermin. It is very important to study their ecology, distribution, and population trends because, despite their size, they’re the ones who balance the ecosystem.

### Reference

**Corbet, G.B. & J.E. Hill (1992).** *Mammals of the Indo-Malayan Region: A Systematic Review*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK.

**Smith, A.T. & C.H. Johnston (2016).** *Rattus pyctoris* (errata version published in 2017). The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species 2016: e.T19370A115150159. <https://doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.UK.2016-3.RLTS.T19370A22445185.en>. Accessed on 16. iv.2026.

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