

Exhibiting small creatures, such as Rodents and Insectivores

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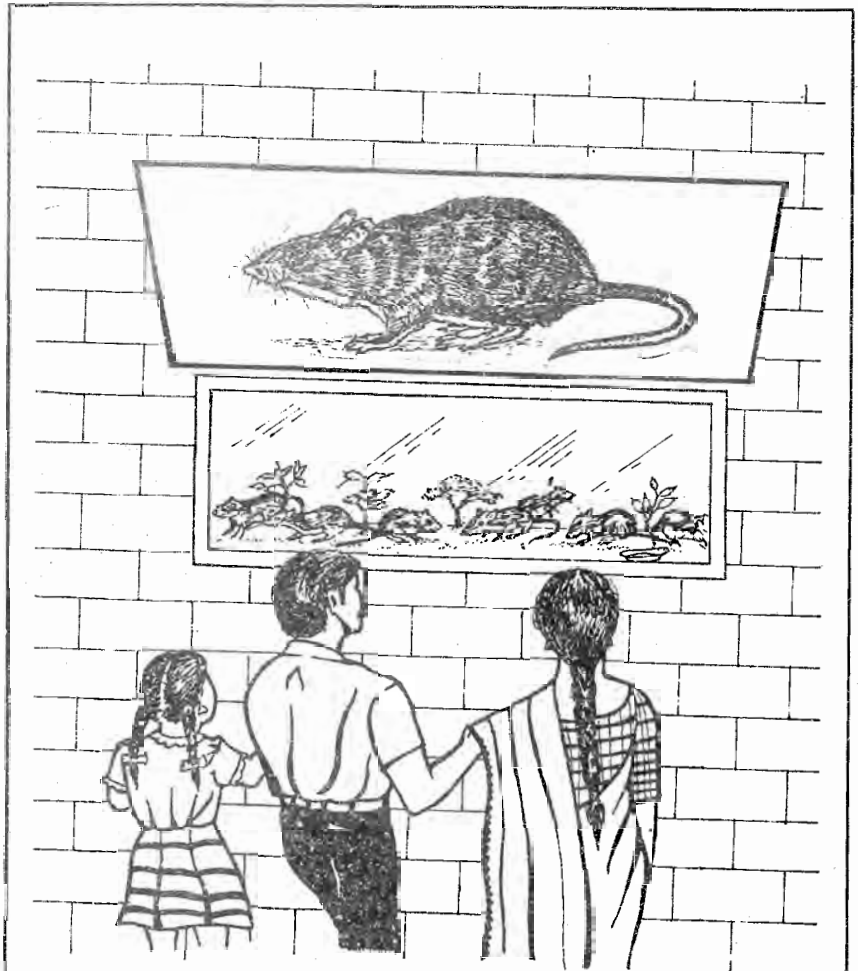
Michael Jordan's paper in this issue, The Potential for Exhibition and Interpretation of Small Mammal Displays, gives very compelling reasons why zoos may like to consider taking up rodents and insectivores for display and breeding. The Mammal series article by this writer in this issue on selected Rodents and Insectivores also gives 43 very good reasons (in the form of 43 threatened species of these species) why zoos should be thinking about taking up the conservation of smaller mammals.

Mike Jordan presented his paper at a conference on exhibit design and showed some pictures of how zoos could exhibit small rodents effectively. His suggestion was that since mice, rats and shrews are small and sometimes hide in their enclosure, a very large and attractive photograph of the animal could be exhibited over the enclosure. The drawing on this page illustrates the concept. A very large photograph of a very small animal is always an attention-getter. Also visitors can see characteristics of the animal they can't see well even up close. The photograph should be attractive...to show the animal at its best, and some rodents are very cute animals actually.

The enclosure is probably most effective as a terrarium with a glass viewing screen rather than wire mesh. These small mammals can be exhibited very well in a largish terrarium which can be decorated to mimic their natural environment.

In order to hold the visitors' attention, the animals can be enticed to be active. Small mammals have a high metabolic rate so tend to zip about more than large mammals in any case. They can be directed to do interesting things by providing enrichment devices some of which are described on the following page. There are many, many more things which can be done to entertain these small creatures, as well as the visitors who will be watching them.

Children in particular love tiny animals and will enjoy these exhibits. It is an excellent method and opportunity to teach both children and adults about the largest mammal group. Visitor perceptions about rodents can be altered from highly negative to positive with the right display and graphic material.



Smallest Mammals

The smallest mammals in this zoo are from the largest group of mammals in the world. Rats, mice and shrews and their relatives from the combined groups (Orders Rodentia and Insectivora) make up more than 50% of all mammals.

There are 2021 species of Rodents (43.7% of all mammals) and 428 species of Insectivores in the world, making up more than 50% of all mammals.

In India there are 125 species of rodents and insectivores out of a total of about 405 mammals, or about 30%. Of these 45 (about 40%) are threatened with extinction.

