

## Small furry animal .... marsupial or rodent..? native or introduced..?



Common Dunnart  
*Sminthopsis murina*



House Mouse  
*Mus musculus*



Black rat  
*Rattus rattus*



Bush Rat  
*Rattus fuscipes*

We are very fortunate to have common dunnarts (*Sminthopsis murina*) living in our area. These are small native carnivorous marsupials from the family **Dasyuridae**. Also in this family are quolls, phascogales, Kowari, planigales, Tasmanian Devils, Kultarr, Mulgara, *Ningau* sp and *Antechinus* sp.

One of the most distinguishing features of the dasyurids is their teeth... they have biting, cutting dentition with four pairs of pointed upper incisors and three lower pairs; well developed upper and lower canines; two or three pairs of upper and lower blade-like premolars and four pairs of upper and lower molars with sharp, shearing cusps.



Brown antechinus *A.stuartii*



Black rat *Rattus rattus*



Brown antechinus *A.stuartii*



Black rat *Rattus rattus*

On the other hand, rodents have only one pair of upper and one pair of lower incisors. These teeth are long, backwardly curved, and grow continuously throughout life. Canine teeth are never present and premolars are lacking in most species.

All Australian rodents dwell in the family Muridae, with the majority (the 'old endemics') in the subfamily Hydromyinae. Seven species of native *Rattus* (the 'new endemics') came to Australia less than a million years ago and are members of the subfamily Murinae. The more recently introduced house mouse, and brown and black rats, also belong to the Murinae.



Common Dunnart *Sminthopsis murina*

Around here the rodents most commonly seen are the introduced house mouse (*Mus musculus*) and black rat (*Rattus rattus*), and the more secretive native bush rat (*Rattus fuscipes*)

Native bush rats and introduced black rats can be difficult to distinguish.

**Black rats** are relatively fearless around humans, often nest in roofs and are agile climbers. Black rats have scaly tails that are longer than their bodies, and big, thin ears.

**Bush rats** have tails that are shorter than their body length, and rounded ears. They are shy and prefer to nest in dense forest understorey.