

DOMESTICATION (LABORATIZATION) OF THE NORWAY RAT AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

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Summary

The widespread use of Norway rats in experimental research, and therefore almost two hundred years and hundreds of generations of breeding in artificial conditions, have led to the forms (strains and breeds) of this species, that are unprecedented in nature. Currently, laboratory strains are used in various experiments i.a. in the field of medicine, biology, and psychology. A growing number of studies, however, points out a number of differences in anatomy, morphology and behavior between the wild rat and its laboratory counterpart. Thus, questions arise about (a) the relevance of the use of laboratory rats in some experiments, (b) the potentiality to generalize obtained results and (c) the justification for the use of these animals as models of natural forms of behavior.

Domestication (actually laboratization) of the rat can be regarded as a specific and highly dynamic evolutionary process. The fact that it can be observed, abundance of available empirical data, and its huge impact on the science makes this process particularly interesting.