

Rehoming of Laboratory Animals

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After the transport: What happens next?

Well bundled for transport with all their needs met, the laboratory rats begin their journey to their foster home. After their arrival, they are first introduced to the care station. Everything is different: the new home, smells, noises, surroundings, even the lights and people are unfamiliar. The furnishings are also unknown. This can be a stress factor for many animals, but not for laboratory animals. It is exciting to watch them excitedly running all around their new domicile and sniffing out everything. No shyness, no fear, just pure curiosity. Running up and down ladders, if they already know about different levels. In the house and then back out. And that? What is that? A bed? Nope, that must be the toilet then.

They adapt quite quickly to the new life. After a few days, the offered pellets are already spurned. Instead, they throw themselves on the grain bowl and await the fresh food bowl with great anticipation. Cucumbers fly away like hot cross buns, carrots too, in the beginning. Cucumber is what they get from day one. During those initial days, the cucumber slices are still counted, as are the carrots. They slowly and gradually become accustomed to the daily fresh food. First they are introduced to various vegetables. Particularly close attention is given to vegetables that are easy on the stomach and also good for digestion. This includes fennel, chicory, zucchini and pumpkin. Lettuce is offered in small portions only after a week, at the earliest. It is fun to prepare the fresh food for the new arrivals, knowing full well that the bowl will be eaten clean. Pickiness only comes later.

The placement of the animals is yet another point on the journey of the rats into domesticated life. Not every inquiry ends with an adoption. Why? Albinos are not necessarily everyone's cup of tea. The red eyes deter some rat lovers. There are questions that abound: "How can I tell the animals apart? They are all white." Yes, they are all white, but if you spend time with the rats, you can quickly note differences. Be it their character, be it the different red of the eyes, or even their ear positioning. Some hold their ears more laterally, while others daunt a jauntier pose. One rat might be more cheeky, the other a little more gentle. Some are slyer, more courageous while others orient themselves to their companions: If they can do that, then so can I. Rats are extremely fascinating animals. Each one has its own personality.

Then there is the crucial question of caretaking: is it suitable for the animals? We are an animal protection organization and adhere strictly to the legal requirements. There is no turning a blind eye. We are also happy to give tips on how to optimize a cage, which might be correct in terms of its basic dimensions, yet still be rather poorly equipped. Many commercially available cages do not consider the rat's joy in running, but are equipped with small seat shelves that leave hardly any room for playing. If the prospective caregiver blocks here and does not show himself to be cooperative, then that's it from our side. No placement will be made.

However, I do not want to go into the details of an optimal rat home here; that would go too far. I would just like to point out that the future home of the laboratory rats - and every animal that we are to place - is given a very high priority. Only providing for an animal's housing is not our target; the new home should be as optimal as possible. Furthermore, experience in keeping rats is also a point that is clarified. This does not mean that a novice rat keeper would not be suitable for laboratory animals. Even beginners can be the right people to adopt. It's the attitude that is important. There are some rat owners who are not aware of their responsibility towards the animals, but consider rats as disposable items: if it no longer fits, take it away. Unfortunately, we are also confronted with this problem. This is another point that we discuss in great detail beforehand. Rats can become expensive animals. An abscess here, a tumor there. This is not necessarily the case, but it may happen. And if there are no reserves for the

veterinarian, then quite a bit of the budget can be nibbled away. Furthermore, the reaction to our protection contract also plays a role: when hesitancy arises at the mention of our protection contract, then there is no “fit”. And without a protection contract, the animals will not be placed. In this way, we want to prevent the animals from becoming traveling trophies where we lose track of their path. The rats remain the property of the Friend of Rats’ Club CH. If something should change at home, be it through illness or family restructuring, then we take care of finding a new home.

I would like to thank everyone who contributed, and continues to contribute, to the success of the Re-Homing project. When Dr. Julika Fitzi asked me if we, as a section of the SAP, could help with this project, I didn't need a moment to stop and think: Yes! Ever so gladly. The past months have shown that it is worth the effort: all adoptive families are more than happy with their laboratory animals. They are cheerful, gentle, super sweet animals that enchant everyone.

My thanks go to all of you who have changed your thinking. To Dr. Paulin Jirkof from the University of Zurich, who entrusts me with the animals and makes sure that they are always handed over without any problems. And to Dr. Julika Fitzi from SAP, who immediately thought of us when the project was slowly taking shape.

Notes
