

## Rat gnawed tortoise's front legs down to the bone in horror attack on hibernating pet

BY BETHANY WHITE, 29 JAN 2016, Dorset, England

The pet was hibernating when a rat pounced - and now it is recovering in plaster casts as vets try to save her legs



Plastered: Norma the tortoise

A traumatised tortoise has been left in plastercasts after being savaged - by a RAT .

Shell-shocked Norma was hibernating when the rodent pounced and her owner found her covered in blood with her front legs "eaten down to the bone".

Her injuries were so bad vets were close to putting the 35-year-old pet down. But Norma is now making a slow recovery after both her front legs were put in plaster to allow her limbs to heal.

Vet Tom Felton said: "Rats will chance their luck especially with an animal that can't fight back, and a hibernating tortoise is easy prey.

"She has damage on both front legs which have been nibbled to the bone, on both front edges of her legs.

"The first week has been important, and she's responding well, but she is not out of the woods yet."

Norma had been hibernating at her home in Stalbridge, Dorset, since November when she was given a rude awakening by the rodent last Sunday.



On the mend: Norma with vet Tom Felton.

Her owner, who does not wish to be named, said she only checked on her tortoise as the weather was unseasonably warm.

"I have kept tortoises all my life and nothing like this has ever happened before," she said.

"I have four tortoises and have been checking on them daily as the weather's been so warm.

"They're in the greenhouse, which has a concrete base, and I leave the door ajar in the morning to let the air circulate, then shut it at night.

"I found her on Sunday evening, out of her hibernation box and there was blood everywhere - her front legs had been eaten down to the bone and it was horrible."



Vets at Friars Moor Veterinary Clinic in Sturminster Newton thought there was nothing they could do to save her.

Mr Felton added: "My colleague who initially saw her feared the worst.

"However, we got hold of a vet at Piddle Valley Vets who specialises in exotic pets, who gave us some advice on how to treat Norma.

"We'll give it a try for a month, complete with antibiotics, pain relief and regular changes of bandages."

It will take four to six weeks for Norma's skin to heal and there may still be a risk of infection.

While Norma can still use her legs and move about, vets still don't know the full extent of damage to her joints.

Norma is now safely home, enjoying a heat lamp and her favourite snack of cherry tomatoes.

Her relieved owner said: "She has a long way to go but she appears to be a fighter."