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Some believe that with restaurants and cafes shut in town and city centres, rats are moving out into residential communities looking for food.

There are concerns over infestation and Lyme disease, which can be contracted through contact with rat urine.

Paul Blackhurst from Rentokil Pest Control said that with more people working from home during the pandemic, they are more likely to notice the signs of rodents.

“However, increasing rodent activity could also be part of a longer-term trend owing to warmer winters over recent years – Met Office data shows that average annual temperatures have increased each year since 2015,” he said.

“Traditionally, colder winters naturally curtail rat and mouse populations to an extent, but milder weather patterns can allow rodents to have more litters in a season, and it also increases the number of rodents in a litter that are likely to survive to adulthood.”

Mr Blackhurst added: “The closure of hospitality businesses has meant rodents have been seen more regularly in residential areas as they look for alternative sources of food waste. Rodents are resourceful and will always move to where food sources are.

“As many take-aways and restaurants have closed during lockdown they are likely to move to other areas in search of food. But, they are likely to again focus their activity in business districts as they open up again and more food sources become available.”

Conservation charity Ulster Wildlife said rats can have a negative impact on native wildlife.

“Brown rats are a non-native species in Ireland and aren’t limited to our urban areas - they can occur in many habitats whether humans are present or not. These non-native predators threaten many of our most iconic species – a particularly good example of this is the impact on our breeding seabirds.

“If left to their own devices, rats can ravage a seabird colony by eating seabird chicks and eggs.

“Many of these species evolved in the absence of rats so they have little in the way of natural defences.

“We are actively working at our Isle of Muck Nature Reserve in Co. Antrim to control the numbers of rats each year before the start of the nesting season. Removing rats from the island

allows species such as kittiwake, razorbill, guillemot, and others to be able to successfully rear their young.”