

# Nature Watch

## Will the Meek Inherit the Earth?

*Kartik Shanker*

**This article gives a brief description about rodents and their impact on natural ecosystems.**



Kartik Shanker spent two years in the Upper Nilgiris studying small mammal and herpetofaunal communities.

Which mammalian order has the largest number of species? The answer, astonishingly, is rodents, derisively known as the feeble folk, because of their insignificant size and strength. However, rats and mice have, as commensals of man or by natural means, invaded every continent except Antarctica. They are found upto altitudes of 5500 metres and occupy almost every type of habitat.

Despite their undisputed success, extensive adaptability, and their use by scientists as laboratory animals, rodents in general and rats in particular have consistently been given bad press. As destroyers of crops, as vectors for disease, and as pests in house and field alike, they have been shunned.

Remember Robert Browning:

*Rats!*

*They fought the 'ogs and killed the cats*

*And bit the babies in the cradles*

*And ate the cheese out of the vats*

*And licked the soup from the cooks own ladles*

*Split open the kegs of salted sprats*

*Made nests inside the men's Sunday hats*

*And even spoiled the women's chats*

*By drowning the speaking*

*With shrieking and squeaking*

*In fifty different sharps and flats.*

From: *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*

However, rodents and other small mammals give credence to the 'small is beautiful' thesis. Of the 4200 odd mammal species,









