**The mice ate my homework**

**By: Amy Tornquist**

East Greenwich RI — Since the 2010-2011 school year, East Greenwich High School has had a rodent infestation that the administration, maintenance, and even New England Pest Control have been attempting to battle, however, even after months of assessing and addressing the problem, the mice still remain inside the school.

For Mrs. Driscoll in room 130 mice made the heating unit their home last year. According to Driscoll, the mice were a disruption to her classes because “they would be scurrying around the room” while she was trying to teach. The mice caused even more of a nuisance in terms of the sanitation of the classroom. Upon arriving to the school, Driscoll would receive some unwelcome surprises; scattered around the room and even in and on top of and in her own desk were mice feces and urine. The maintenance staff would be called in to clean the room then use bleach to kill the diseases that are carried in the fecal matter of mice. However, students were unhappy with this solution as they were forced to cope with the burning scent of bleach in their noses throughout the time they spent in the classroom.

Because of the quantity of mice in the school there is a high probability that some of the mice carry diseases that are quite harmful to humans such as Lyme disease, rat-bite fever, and the Black Plague. Some of these diseases are not transmitted through fecal matter or urine but rather by mites, ticks, or direct contact with the mice — most often a bite.

In their efforts to end the mouse epidemic, the school employed New England Pest Control to come in and use their professional skills and techniques to drive the mice away. When New England Pest Control arrived and “did an assessment, they determined that the mice was entering through a pipe that leads directly from the outside of the school into my classroom,” Driscoll recounts. In order to prevent the mice from reentering the school, “steel wool was placed around the pipe.” Since employing this method, Driscoll no longer has mice in her classroom, however they still wreak havoc in other areas of the school.

The long term duration of the mouse problem is obviously frustrating to the school administration. Since last year, changes have been made to the student handbook, explicitly prohibiting students from eating during class. Students are now only permitted to consume food while in the cafeteria during their designated lunch period. Also, more care was taken in ensuring that doors leading from the inside of the school to outside remained shut when not in use so that mice would have less access into the school.

However, not all changes made throughout the East Greenwich High School campus have a made positive impact on the eradication of the mice. Many trees have been cut down around the school, as well as across the town to make room for new fields or new homes. In the efforts to accommodate people other species have been neglected, one of which is the red tailed hawk. The red tailed hawk is a natural predator of mice and other rodents and small animals that humans consider a nuisance or pests. One of these hawks has been seen by East Greenwich senior Velinda Peralta enjoying its lunch of a mouse while she was outside eating lunch herself at the school.

This hawk is most likely the only in the immediate vicinity as red hawks are extremely territorial and will attack other hawks that impede on its territory. This specific species of hawk prefers to build its nest in the heights of tall oak trees, many of which have recently been felled around the school causing a decline in the area that these hawks can habituate. The lack of habitable area for the red tailed hawk causes fewer mice to be naturally taken out of the ecosystem. Peralta believes if “the hawks had more area to live in, there would be less mice causing problems in the school.” Instead of spending money on traps and other extermination methods, we should focus efforts on preserving the habitats of natural predators.