

# Long-distance swim by rat in open water astounds scientists

*The Associated Press*  
WELLINGTON, N.Z.

A rodent named Razza gave a whole new meaning to the phrase rat race during a four-month chase across two deserted islands in New Zealand.

Like a furry Robinson Crusoe, Razza, a brown Norwegian rat, was cast away and left to fend for himself in an experiment New Zealand researchers said has given new insight into why it's so hard to eradicate vermin from fragile island ecosystems.

For 18 weeks, Razza sidestepped countless traps and turned up his nose at poisoned bait before eventually plunging into the South Pacific and paddling 400 metres in open water to a new island in search of love, said research published in this week's issue of the journal *Nature*.

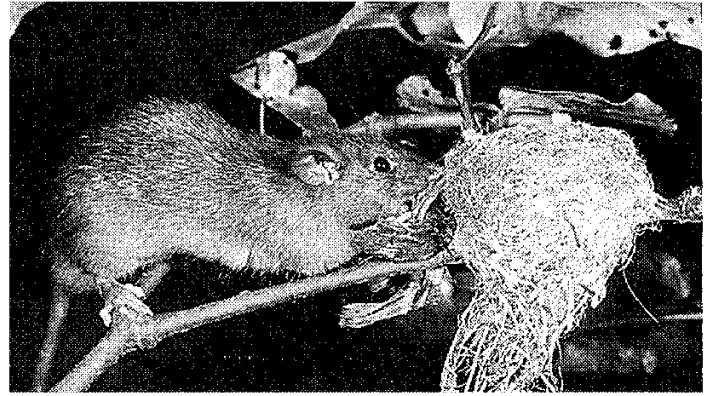
The study was motivated by the need for conservation "because of the problems of rats on islands and rats reinvading islands that have been cleared," author Mick Clout of the University of Auckland's School of Biological Sciences said Thursday.

"We wanted to test how difficult it would be to catch a single rodent using the standard methods of elimination (used for) for higher density populations," he said.

At least 11 New Zealand offshore islands cleared of rodents have been reinvaded in the past two decades.

Despite being weighed down by a tiny radio transmitter collar, Razza eluded intensive efforts to trap him during his 10-week sojourn on New Zealand's uninhabited and forested Motuoropapa Island.

During that time, the rat evaded an arsenal of traps and poisoned baits that included peanut but-



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**Razza, a brown Norwegian rat, searches for food on New Zealand's uninhabited and forested Motuoropapa Island.**

ter. He even continued to stay one step ahead of sniffer dogs sent in to track him down.

Then he disappeared, only to turn up on neighbouring Otata Island after his dip, apparently motivated by primordial urges during the spring-summer mating season, Clout said.

Researchers believe Razza's island-hopping journey was the longest confirmed swim by a rat.

The saga didn't end there. Scientists spent another eight weeks trying to eliminate the elusive invader on the second island.

"We were literally tearing our hair out at times trying to find this animal," Clout said.

The lure of fresh penguin meat was finally what ended Razza's 18 weeks on the lam — he was killed in the trap.

The scientists have since released another solo male rat with radio transmitter on the rodent-free 9.5-hectare Motuoropapa Island to make sure Razza's race wasn't a fluke.

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