

Forget better mouse traps: save the forest

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Wildlife Conservation Society scientists in New York say the most cost-effective way to control rats on the Fiji Islands is to protect standing forests.

Rats and mongooses are decimating highly endangered species on Fiji's larger tropical islands. The Bronx Zoo's WCS experts say the best way to control the predators is not by intensive trapping but by preserving forest blocks where wildlife live.

The scientists found rats and mongooses rarely penetrated into the forest interior, preferring instead to forage along the forests' edges.

The finding is potentially good news for species such as the pink-billed parrotfinch, banded iguana and Fijian land snail, all of which live deep within Fiji's remaining forests.

By using bait stations designed to attract rats and mongooses, the researchers discovered stations located more than approximately 3 miles from the forest edge were rarely visited.

"Protection of the few remaining large blocks of natural forests on Pacific islands may be the most cost-effective approach for conserving many rare species threatened by rats and mongooses," said WCS researcher David Olson, lead author of the study.

The research appears in the latest issue of the journal *Conservation Biology*.

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