

# China fights gerbil plague with 'the pill'

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Authorities in northwestern China have resorted to using a contraception-abortion pill to rein in a plague of gerbils which is threatening the local desert ecosystem, state media said Wednesday.

Forestry officials in the city of Changji in the vast Xinjiang region began distributing the pellets last May to curb the exploding gerbil population, Xinhua news agency said.

The gerbils' large burrow systems in the Gurbantungut Desert had begun to damage the root systems of the few plants that can survive in the area, while also damaging local agriculture, it said.

The pellets contain a specially developed contraceptive and an [abortion](#) drug, the report quoted Du Yuefei, head of the epidemic prevention section of the city's forestry bureau, as saying.

"Besides [pregnancy prevention](#), the drug can induce abortions and thus largely reduce their breeding rate," Du said.

"It's a good way to tackle the desert rodent plague."

The drug has "little effect" on other animals, the report said.

Previously, local authorities had set up perches for birds of prey, [natural predators](#) of the [gerbils](#).

Du said the project could be extended to deal with rodent problems elsewhere in northwestern China.

About 200 kilograms (440 pounds) of pellets have been scattered near burrows across 49,000 hectares (121,000 acres) last year, causing a noticeable drop in gerbil population density, Du said.

However, the report gave no hard figures showing the population reduction.

It said a female can give birth to a new litter every three months.

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