



Eagle Island restoration project 2006

Professor David Bellamy first dreamt of ridding Eagle Island of rats in the 1970s to allow sea birds and turtles to flourish. The task was taken up by Nigel Wenban-Smith when he was Chairman of Chagos Conservation Trust. A little seed money from the Trust and much perseverance by Nigel resulted in funds which made it possible for Fauna and Flora International to mount a project and carry out a preliminary survey in 2003 to devise a scheme to kill the *Rattus rattus* of Eagle Island.

A team of 11 volunteers landed on the island in February 2006. Working in pairs they established a 30 metre by 30 metre grid system for nearly 3,000 bait stations cutting more than 82 kilometres of line through the open palm forest of the 5 kilometre long island, all in only six weeks. Unfortunately it was not only open palm forest; the large palm swamp, the mangrove bushes and trees, dense walls of dead hibiscus and broad bands of *Scaevola* caused a great deal of unexpected even harder work.

In Phase 2 the bait stations were loaded with the poison Talon G™, which does not harm the coconut crabs but is toxic to all vertebrates including fish, so it had to be used very carefully indeed. The bait was replaced daily until the day came to leave the island at the end of April.

Some fifteen thousand rats were killed. A follow-up expedition in March 2007 found unfortunately that some rats still lived there and they will breed and repopulate the island. It is hoped to raise funds for another expedition to try again in the future.

We thank Darryl Birch, Nicholas Cole, Elaine Fraser, Peter Haveson, Chris Hillman, Nicole Lohrmann, Eleanor McManus, Fieke Molenaar, Guntram Meier, Alex Page and Andrew Sheppard for their very hard work.

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A full account of their adventures can be found in **Chagos News** No 28.

The **Chagos Conservation Trust** is a charity (Registered in the UK No. 1031561), whose aims are to promote conservation, scientific and historical research, and to advance education concerning the archipelago. The Trust is a non political association.

If you would like to know more visit www.chagos-trust.org or contact the Secretary at simonhughes@hughes-mccormack.co.uk