

## New giant species of rat discovered



You wouldn't want to find this in the kitchen! CREDIT: JOURNAL OF MAMMALOGY

By The Telegraph, 15 APRIL 2016

A new giant species of rat has been discovered on the Manus Island in the South Pacific.

This giant rodent, despite its size and heft, has been lurking there for thousands of years, according to scientists, and has only been discovered recently.

Researchers have published a new study unveiling *Rattus detentus* in the Journal of Mammalogy, named after the Latin word for “detained”.

This is because Australia is sending asylum seekers to detention camps on the Papua New Guinean island for processing, and is also a reference to the long time that the rat has been living there itself.

Local residents have long said they suspected a giant rodent was living on the island, and large, rodent teeth marks have been discovered on tough nuts from the *Canarium indicum* tree.

Then, in 2002, a partial skeleton was handed to a researcher, bringing them closer to the discovery.

They've now been able to describe and photograph the rat for the first time.

“I've been looking for this rat for 30 years,” Professor Tim Flannery, one of the authors of the new study, told the Guardian.

The rat is one of the largest to be found in the region, weighing in at 1.1 kilograms, but it doesn't currently beat the worldwide record for fat rats - the Bosavi woolly rat tips the scales at an impressive 1.5 kilograms (3.3 pounds).

This new species is easily spotted by its coarse fur and short tail, and because it is represented in the fossil record - its remains have been excavated on a site on the island that dates to the Late Holocene - the researchers think it has been on the island for quite some time.

This has allowed the species to evolve to its massive size. Sadly, the rat appears to be endangered, as sightings of the large rodent appear to be rare.

#### Rat Facts:

- There are more than 60 species of rat across the world. The largest is the Bosavi woolly rat, found in Papua New Guinea, which is typically 80cm long
- The adage that you are only ever six feet from a rat is an urban myth; the number is anywhere from 10 to 164ft, depending on where you live
- A rat's front teeth grow 11 to 14 cm each year, which they wear down by gnawing on surfaces.
- A rat can tread water for three days, go without food for four days and survive being flushed down the toilet. Some species can swim up to one mile in open water
- Rats can fall from a height of 15 metres without getting hurt and jump one metre in the air from a flat surface
- Rats could one day become bigger than cows, claims geologist Dr Jan Zalasiewicz, from the University of Leicester. He said: "Given enough time, rats could probably grow to be at least as large as the capybara, the world's largest living rodent, that can reach 80 kilos (17lb)"