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## Rats be Gone: Rodent control begins on St. Eustatius. (</st-maarten-st-martin-news/25197-rats-be-gone-rodent-control-begins-on-st-eustatius.html>)

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Sint Eustatius:---The island of Sint Eustatius has initiated an ambitious two-year project to reduce the number of rats on the island. The project has two leaders, Hannah Madden (Caribbean Netherlands Science Institute), who will look into the impact of rats on biodiversity, and Dr. Teresa Leslie (Eastern Caribbean Public Health Foundation), who will investigate the public health threat. Through these combined activities it is the responsibility of these co-investigators to significantly decrease the number of rats on the island and implement a sustainable rat control program.

Rats in Sint Eustatius are increasingly becoming a problem to humans and nature alike. According to Madden, “rats eat almost everything, from flowers and fruits to plants and meat. Not just agricultural produce, but also the native flora and fauna of the island, are impacted. This could very well result in a reduction of the number of different plants and animals found on Statia, which has happened on rat-infested islands elsewhere. A decline in the island’s biodiversity has various negative effects. It affects ecosystem products and services (such as fresh water and food), and indirectly affects livelihoods and income.” She continues by stating how “rats have been documented eating the single-egg clutch of red-billed tropicbirds during the nesting season, and are likely to impact many other vertebrate species on Statia.”

According to Leslie, in addition to being a risk to nature and biodiversity, rats pose a major threat to public health. Rats carry potential diseases which pose a direct risk to human and animal health”. “The bacterial disease leptospirosis, which is often associated with rats, poses a serious threat in the Caribbean and is not adequately documented” says Leslie. Through a

collaboration with Ross University School of Veterinarian Medicine in St. Kitts, a component of this work will investigate diseases rats in Statia may be carrying. Leslie believes that “knowing about potential diseases can be used to raise community awareness about the need to reduce the number of rats on the island”.

Both Madden and Leslie agree that community involvement is critical to the success of the program. “The people of St. Eustatius identify rats as an island problem. However, there is no systematic approach to their control” says Leslie. According to Madden, “in order for this project to be successful, the community must be engaged and understand that they can play a major role in solving our rat problem”.

This two-year, island-wide rodent control project began on February 1. The project is funded by the Netherlands Ministry of Economic Affairs and facilitated through the Caribbean Netherlands Science Institute (CNSI). In 2019, the Public Health Department will continue to implement the rodent control program created by Leslie and Madden to ensure long-term sustainability.

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