Updated 2023

FAQs for future islands rat eradication (Bryher, St Martins, Tresco)

Why propose a further rat eradication project for Scilly?

The Isles of Scilly are a nationally and internationally important location for seabirds, particularly Manx shearwater, European storm petrel and black-backed gull. Both Manx shearwaters and European storm

petrels are amber listed under the United Kingdom Birds of Conservation Concern. There is a pressing need to conserve and protect our vulnerable seabird populations, alongside the need to protect and improve our wider natural environment.

The eradication of invasive species from islands is one of the most important tools in conservation. The removal of rats is a recognised requirement for the restoration of many seabird colonies on islands, with rodents successfully eradicated from over 700 islands around the world, including on at least 10 UK islands. To maximise the resilience of the existing seabird population, we are looking at ways to reduce the impact of rat predation upon Scilly's seabirds, following the successful removal of rats from St Agnes and Gugh in 2013/14.

When will the proposed eradication happen, if it goes ahead?

Our current estimate is 4 years away, at the earliest. The development phase will take 1-2 years and if a decision is made to proceed, securing funding could take a similar length of time depending upon where the funds come from.

How much could a possible project cost and who is funding it?

The current proposal, to remove rats from St Martin's, Bryher, Tresco and all associated offshore islands and set up the necessary biosecurity arrangements, will cost at least £4 million. Any in-kind support will help reduce this figure. We will consider a range of funding sources for the project, but no funds are currently in place. This will be a major investment in the Isles of Scilly and will support a range of activities including the conservation restoration of many islands, both inhabited and uninhabited. As we only get one opportunity to do the work it is vital that the job is done thoroughly.

There are additional benefits from this work that adds value to this investment, such as the removal of the need to bait and other mitigation measures and the savings from rat-damage to property and food. In addition, the money will be invested in Scilly, supporting a wide range of local businesses.

Where will the money come from? Similar previous projects have matched funding from local and national sources, including from charitable and government funding sources. As part of the development phase we will investigate the various public, private and charitable options.

What are the opportunities for local people?

The role of the St Agnes community in decision-making and the long-term management of their rat free project was key to its success. Each family saw an average saving of £540 on St Agnes and Gugh as a result of the project. Feedback from residents included; income from accommodation and

hospitality services; media interested which increased eco-tourism; income from new business ventures (e.g. boat trips to see seabirds, storytelling, seabird crafts); money saved from ceasing rat control and replacing damaged items or produce (e.g. some vegetables could grow better without rat predation, lobster pots stored over winter were no longer damaged); improved recycling and food waste; plus general benefits of living on a rat free island (many people were scared of either the zoonotic diseases spread by rats, or finding a rat itself in attics, out buildings and vegetation, these fears were removed from their everyday lives, along with baiting).

We would like to get your feedback on what opportunities you would hope to see through future direct conversations, a questionnaire, community events or please provide details to us as soon as possible.

What's to stop rats being transported between islands by boat?

Inter-island and mainland boat traffic does pose a risk in this respect. A rat reached St Agnes by boat in late 2017 and was only stopped by the fast action of local community members. The vigilance and co-operation of boat users will be required to help prevent rats from getting back to any of the islands from which rats are eradicated.

Biosecurity information, guides and support are available for boat owners, operators and users. There are new biosecurity tools available in the UK including the use of biosecurity dogs. Dog handlers and their specially trained dogs can detect stowaways and their use in ongoing biosecurity on Scilly is highly likely.

A robust biosecurity action plan will be written as part of this 2023 revision of the feasibility and operation plan, as was prepared for St Agnes as part of their rat eradication.

What if community members disagree with the proposals?

The purpose of this development phase is to identify and investigate any issues to see whether they can be resolved by changing the design and on the ground delivery of the work required. We are keen to speak to everyone so please do contact us if you would like to discuss or raise anything at this initial stage. Community consent is required to ensure the operational viability of the project and as with other similar projects community decision making will be at the heart of any project.

General FAQs

What has previously happened with rat eradication and island restoration on the Isles of Scilly?

The Isles of Scilly Seabird Recovery Project (IOSSRP) was successful, with St Agnes and Gugh declared rat-free in early 2017. Biosecurity actions to prevent the return of rats will be needed in perpetuity.

This is still the largest community-based successful island restoration project in the world to date, although Lord Howe Island, NSW, Australia may be declared rodent free later this year (with 350 inhabitants) and there are other projects in the UK and across the world which are underway.

IOSSRP had the following main objectives:

• Reverse recent declines in seabird populations on the Isles of Scilly through removal of non-native species (brown rats) from the islands of St Agnes and Gugh and maintaining Annet and associated uninhabited islands as rat-free.

• Enable people living on and visiting the Isles of Scilly to learn about, take pride in, and play an active role in celebrating and conserving their seabird heritage.

• Train and support island communities to embrace the benefits of the seabird recovery, including the removal of brown rats, and continue to protect their heritage once the project has ended.

The IOSSRP reformed in 2022 and confirmed that rats remained largest threat to burrow nesting sea birds on land, so the feasibility of rat eradication is being revisited.

Were rats removed from uninhabited Round island in 2022?

Yes, they had never been recorded on Round Island before but were found in January 2022 through the work of Biosec for Life, a joint partnership (they likely swam from nearby St Helen's). As Round Island is important for breeding storm petrels and Manx shearwater, RSPB (with partners IOSWT, Trinity House, Duchy of Cornwall, AONB, Natural England) removed the rats with local volunteers between January and April 2022. We believe the rats were successfully removed but a two-year period is required before the island can be declared rat-free.

What would a future islands rat eradication project entail?

The current proposals include removing rats from three inhabited islands – Bryher, Tresco and St Martin's, as well as up to 35 uninhabited islands nearby. All these islands need to be done at the same time as they are all within the swimming distance of brown rats.

Why is St Mary's not included?

St Mary's is not included in the proposals due to several factors, including challenges with waste infrastructure and complexities with waste management, the much larger number of people living there, lower public support and the presence of other predators. As it stands, the removal of brown rats from St Mary's is not feasible with current techniques but we will monitor the situation in case this changes and continue to work with people on St Mary's to improve the feasibility of a future project there.

Who will manage this rat eradication project?

The proposals are still very much at the planning stage but we envisage the project will be a partnership between Isles of Scilly Wildlife Trust, RSPB, Natural England, Duchy of Cornwall, the Isles of Scilly Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and representatives from Bryher, St Martin's and Tresco Estate.

Who will do the work?

Again, the proposals are very much at the planning stage but we envisage the project will be overseen by a specialist Project Manager, who will work teams of employees, specialist contractors and volunteers. The aim would also be to bring employment to community members on Scilly.

Seabird FAQs

Does rat eradication benefit seabirds?

Rats are known to have very detrimental effects on seabird populations through predation and competition for food and habitat. Their removal quickly leads to benefits for seabird populations, notably increased seabird numbers. On St Agnes and Gugh, Manx shearwaters were recorded successfully breeding within one year of the eradication and 73 pairs were recorded in 2016 compared to 22 pairs and no fledged chicks in 2013. European storm petrels were first recorded returning to St Agnes in 2015, with 9 pairs in 2016.

Manx shearwaters on Ramsey and Lundy Islands have increased nearly tenfold in the 15 years since the eradication of brown and black rats and the recolonization of European storm petrels and other small burrowing seabird species has been recorded after long absences.

How important are the islands for seabirds?

The Isles of Scilly are nationally and internationally important for seabirds with breeding populations of 14 species and approximately 16,000 birds found during the last full survey in 2015/16, a significant decrease from the more than 20,000 in 2006 and from previous numbers of hundreds of thousands The islands are particularly important for Manx shearwater, European storm petrel and black-backed gull. Both Manx shearwaters and European storm petrels are amber listed under the United Kingdom Birds of Conservation Concern.

The population of storm petrel on the islands is of international importance. There were 1,398 pairs in 2006. It is one of only two locations in England where Manx shearwater breed. Geographically the islands lie towards the southern edge of both these species' ranges.

If they are already important, why do you need to do anything more?

Seabird populations in Scilly are important but also vulnerable. They face a variety of threats. On land the biggest threat is predation of eggs and chicks by brown rats. The overall population of seabirds declined by 31.3% between 1983 and 2015/16. Historically the population of seabirds was in the hundreds of thousands but has now declined to just 15,994 birds (7997 pairs). To help the islands' seabird populations meet future challenges opportunities to improve their current conservation status and breeding range need to be addressed.

Technical FAQs

How do you know the work included in this rat eradication proposal is feasible?

An initial feasibility study published in 2011 reviewed existing work protecting the uninhabited islands from brown rats and identified opportunities to enhance numbers of Manx shearwater and

storm petrel in particular on inhabited islands by providing currently unoccupied and potentially suitable habitat through future rat removal work.

An assessment of whether rat removal would work on St Agnes and Gugh, so that these two species could colonise unoccupied habitat, was included in this study. A more specific feasibility study and operational plan was developed by RSPB in 2016 building on the above.

A Feasibility Study seeks to determine the likelihood of success and the sustainability of an eradication. A proposed project must pass seven key tests:

•Technical feasibility– proven techniques are available that will achieve the desired outcome

•Sustainability – risks of reinvasion are low or can be reduced to low through biosecurity measures

•Social acceptability – the project has the support of island residents, land managers and stakeholders

•Political and legal acceptability – the necessary techniques are legal or permissions can be sought, and are likely/expected to be granted, to be able to deploy them

•Environmental acceptability – risks to non-target species and the wider environment can be avoided or reduced to acceptable levels and there is a net positive effect for nature

•Capacity – all the skills and expertise required are available to the project

•Affordability – sufficient funds are available/can be raised to complete and sustain the project, including for the on-going biosecurity measures that are required.

The removal of brown rats from Bryher, St Martin's and Tresco is feasible as long as all three islands and associated uninhabited islands are targeted together. In addition a number of issues would need to be addressed on the islands to reduce the food available to rats e.g. feeding of gamebirds.

In 2016 workshops held on each of the islands were well attended and 79 people completed questionnaires to help with the feasibility study. This included representatives of the Tresco Estate and the main farms on each of the islands. Tresco and the farmers were all supportive and overall 70 people were supportive with the remainder responding maybe. Now in 2023, we would like to review this feasibility study as risks and opportunities will have changed.

Socio-economic benefit FAQs

What about the benefits for the island communities and visitors?

There are a considerable number of benefits to both the island communities and visitors. St Agnes has seen extensive benefits, ranging from the more obvious cost savings associated with being rat free, to an increased interest in seabirds and connection to the island's environment, with long term educational benefits particularly for local children.

Removing rats altogether from Bryher, St Martin's and Tresco would help remove the ongoing cost of rodenticide to households, both those using 'over the counter' products for their own pest control and those using local professional services, as well as removing the risk of exposure to bait of non-target animals in the long-term.

Rats carry various diseases that can affect humans as well as other animals. Their removal helps reduce the risk of the spread of such diseases, some of which can be fatal. There have been two recorded cases of Weil's disease on the islands, a dangerous illness transmitted mainly by rats.

Rats can and do cause damage to properties and crops and can impact the enjoyment of the islands by visitors and residents. The removal of rats will provide an economic benefit to tourism as well as farming, eliminating the need for continued private baiting.

The project would also help owners and managers of properties meet the requirements of Government food safety legislation. This, for example, requires exclusion of pests from buildings used for food storage. Waste management improvements that reduce food availability to rats would also serve to reduce the impact around such sites of gulls, which may open rubbish bags and scatter the contents and assist the islands in meeting Government environmental and recycling targets

From responses from the 2011 feasibility study the costs to the Isles of Scilly of rat control, damage, contamination and associated health issues were estimated to be up to £200,000 per year across all islands.

While not a direct focus of the current project, St Mary's will likely also see benefits, for example improved biosecurity from Penzance and on the quay at St Mary's should mean less cargo is damaged and fewer rats are introduced, while improvements to waste management should decrease the rat population on St Mary's.

Wider wildlife FAQs

Will rat removal increase the numbers of breeding gulls?

We do not believe that the work will significantly increase numbers of large gulls. They tend to breed in a range of natural and artificial locations where rats may or may not be present. The RSPB and Natural England are currently monitoring breeding productivity on natural sites where rats are both absent and present as well as on 'artificial' sites in Hugh Town. This monitoring process was started after dramatic declines were recorded at natural colonies.

The population in more natural locations both with and without rats has been undergoing similar fluctuations in breeding productivity. This would seem to indicate that the breeding productivity of gulls may be linked to other issues than the abundance of rats.

As anticipated, the highest breeding productivity of gulls anywhere on the islands is in Hugh Town, where an abundant food source supports high productivity, warm nest sites, and rooftop predators are few. Removing food sources available in urban areas may well require gulls to relocate and collect food in other locations (as well as reduce the number of rats).

Will the rat removal affect rabbit numbers?

Rabbit populations may increase after the removal of rats from islands where they are present, as rats predate upon the young rabbits, but this is not always the case. The number of rabbits on St Agnes and Gugh increased following the removal of rats. However, this increase was influenced by the outbreak of myxomatosis prior to the eradication, resulting in a very low rabbit population starting to recover. Rabbit numbers have not increased on Lundy following successful rat removal.

We recognise that rabbit numbers may increase and communities on the three inhabited islands included in the proposed project may need to control rabbits in the future as they have always done. Please get in touch with Jaclyn Pearson for more information.

Will the rat removal lead to an increase in Pittosporum or other potentially invasive plants?

Dietary studies on rats from St Agnes showed that Pittosporum seeds formed part of their diet. There is also some concern that rats may be caching the Pittosporum seeds, which may then germinate and spread once rats are no longer around to eat them. However, it is also very likely that rabbits will control seedlings and stock will successfully graze out new young plants.

While the preliminary results from St Agnes and Gugh suggest that Pittosporum increasing after the removal is rats is unlikely to be a problem, this species will be included in the ecological monitoring work on all the islands on which it is present. Any areas of Pittosporum increasing their range can be controlled with cutting and the immediate application of herbicide. The removal of Pittosporum prior to eradication on uninhabited islands may be helpful in reducing alternative food sources for rats.

Rat and H&S FAQ's

Which rat species occur in the Isles of Scilly?

Only brown rats *Rattus norvegicus* are known to occur on the islands and no black rats *Rattus rattus* were found during the feasibility study. Black rats have been recorded historically on the Isles of Scilly (in particular on Samson between 1300 and 1478) but are presumed to have died out in the late 1400s; they were not found as part of this survey.

How many brown rats are there on the Isles of Scilly?

The study in 2009 estimated the population of brown rats on the Isles of Scilly was 34,500 (likely to be higher in 2023):

- St Agnes and Gugh: 3,100 (9%)
- Bryher: 2,500 (7%)
- Tresco: 7,450 (22%)
- St Martin's: 5,100 (15%)
- St Mary's is: 16,350 (47%)

This is a density of between 20 and 25 brown rats per hectare depending on the habitat type. Most inhabited islands around the world have rat densities that range between 15 and 50 rats per hectare, depending on habitat.

Are rats a native species?

No. Brown rats are an introduced species. They arrived in the UK around 1720 and were recorded on Scilly in 1728. Black rats are not native to the UK either.

Can rats swim?

Yes, they can. Our study took this into account because it's something that will make the re-incursion risk of rats much higher for islands that are close together (re-incursion is when the species re-colonises islands it has been removed from). Based upon the known swimming abilities of rats the study found that the inhabited islands could be grouped into three;

1. St Agnes and Gugh

2. Bryher, Tresco and St Martins

3. St Mary's

This would require working on Bryher, Tresco and St Martin's simultaneously, as well as more than 30 uninhabited islands within rat swimming distance.

What do rats eat?

Rats are omnivorous and eat a wide range of foods including the eggs, chicks and adults of seabirds. During the feasibility study for St Agnes they were also recorded eating Scilly shrews, blackberries, seeds, heather, Pittosporum and invertebrates such as worms, insects, limpets and crabs.

Is rat control work new on the islands?

No. Rat control and removal work for conservation purposes has been going on across the islands for over 25 years. However, the complete eradication of rats from islands where they should not be able to recolonise naturally, began in Scilly with the work on St Agnes and Gugh. The historical work on the islands has given us a much greater knowledge and understanding of the methods available.

Is rat removal often carried out on inhabited islands?

Although it is more usual for this kind of work to take place on uninhabited islands, rats have been eradicated from increasing numbers of inhabited islands worldwide. Overall, there have been eradication projects on nearly 1000 islands globally with around 10% of these on inhabited islands.

What does rat removal involve?

Detailed planning and risk assessments, permits and approvals, operational details, continued community consultation, a biosecurity strategy, contracts and monitoring and research programmes will all be needed before the project goes ahead, as well as attracting the considerable amount of funding needed.

The rat removal operation would occur over winter, from October to March, in a single 180-day operation. It would be run as four interlinked sub-projects (one each on Bryher, Tresco and St

Martins and a fourth covering the uninhabited islands) under the oversight of a single Operational Manager. Monitoring for surviving rats will continue for two years before a final decision on the success of the rat removal programme can be given. Monitoring of invertebrates, land birds, seabirds and vegetation will also continue through these two years. After this time, the island residents and project staff will be responsible for monitoring rat activity.

The most appropriate method for the islands will be a ground-based operation using bait stations set out in a 50 x 50m grid containing rodenticide in a wax block formulation, as was carried out on St Agnes and Gugh. The likely rodenticides to be used are bromadiolone and difenacoum, both second generation anticoagulants, both of which have formulations registered for use outdoors in open areas. The work will be carried out during the winter months when success is likely to be highest as natural food resources for rats are at their most scarce.

The bait will be enclosed inside plastic bait stations to reduce the risks of poisoning non-target species. These stations will be placed at regular intervals across the island and checked regularly to assess progress, add extra bait if needed and to address any issues. Stations on inhabited islands will be checked every 1-3 days while those on uninhabited islands will be checked as often as possible, ideally every 1-2 weeks.

Doing the project in winter will also avoid disturbing the breeding seabirds we are trying to protect, most of which are absent between October and March and avoid the main tourist season. Contingency plans will be in place to allow for immediate and effective reaction to any surviving rats or any incursion that may occur after the end of the main eradication phase.

A final check will be carried out two years after the removal phase to confirm the 'rat free' status of the islands. In the wild rats live to around 18 months so this time period allows for the death of any single rats (a breeding population would become evident far sooner).

Why does the project use poison?

Anticoagulant rodenticides, the type which will be used in this project, are slow-acting, resulting in the death of rats 3-7 days after they have eaten a lethal dose of bait. We accept that this slow method of action raises concerns that these products are not humane. However, this slow action is necessary to bypass an important piece of rat behaviour – some rats in the population can be very wary of new foods and may only eat a small amount at first. If they then feel ill within the next 16 hours or so, they will not eat any more of this food – so called ‘bait shyness’.

This means that fast acting poisons will only kill a proportion of the population, whilst the more wary animals will eat a small non-lethal dose, feel ill effects and not return to eat enough to kill them. Likewise, using rat traps will also not target the entire population as wary animals will not approach them. While fast acting poisons and traps are effective for controlling rat populations (i.e. reducing the number of rats present), they will not eradicate (i.e. totally remove) entire populations. With slow acting anticoagulant poisons, wary rats will sample a small amount but, due to the slow action of the toxin, will not feel ill effects within the critical 16-hour window, and are far more likely to return to consume a lethal dose.

In the absence of a fast-acting poison or trap that will target the entire population, we rely on anticoagulants which have a proven track record in eradicating rats from islands around the world. These products are used widely across the UK by individuals, contractors and public bodies including Councils and the proposed project will conform to all relevant legislation on animal welfare. The

project will work to the highest technical standards so that we can maximise our chances of achieving eradication in the first attempt, thus minimising the number of rats killed by this method overall. If we get the eradication right, no more rats (excepting new arrivals) will need to be killed by this method on the islands in the future.

Were there lots of dead rats lying around?

No. There were only 20 found above ground during the entire St Agnes operation as rats usually move back to their burrows to die. On Lundy only three dead rats and on Canna only five were found in the open during the duration of the project. Searching for and disposing of dead rats is one of the legal requirements of using this kind of poison and is a responsibility the project will take very seriously.

How will you reduce the risk of poisoning other things?

The feasibility study has assessed the risks and specific measures required on each island. Experience from other projects has shaped the design of rat bait stations to exclude key non-target species such as birds and rabbits that are found on many of the Isles of Scilly, as well as humans, cats, dogs and domestic stock, thus sharply reducing the risks of 'primary' non-target poisoning (where animals eat the bait directly). The timing of the baiting also means that many bird species will not be present.

A few raptor species (owls, merlin, peregrine and sparrowhawk) are present throughout the winter but primarily hunt birds and are highly unlikely to suffer 'secondary' poisoning by eating rats that have consumed rodenticide. Kestrels are very unlikely to take such a large prey item. Risks to these species will be minimised by collecting and disposing of dead rats.

Scilly shrews (lesser white-toothed shrew) feed on invertebrates and do not normally feed on bait and so their risk of poisoning is low. In addition, there was evidence that brown rats were predating Scilly shrews. Shrews were monitored during the St Agnes & Gugh and preliminary results suggest that their numbers have increased since the rat removal.

Due to their home range sizes being much smaller than the proposed rodenticide grid, although wood mice on Tresco and house mice on St Martins will take the bait, only a small proportion of the population will be affected.

Any dead mice will also be carefully searched for and disposed of safely to further reduce risks of secondary poisoning. For the St Agnes and Gugh project, permission from the Health and Safety Executive was obtained to use the baits that were necessary to get the job done, and in order to gain the permits, we had to demonstrate that our methods and contingency plans meet the required standards.

What happens if a person or a pet eats the poison?

Anticoagulant poisons are toxic to all birds and mammals. If people or pets ate enough of the bait it could kill them. However, people would have to eat a large quantity of bait in order to consume a lethal dose – based on the methods proposed, an adult would have to eat all the bait in every bait station over an area of at least 40ha – the size of 40 football pitches. As an additional safety measure

the bait also contains bitrex™ (denatonium benzoate): a bittering agent to make the bait taste unpleasant to humans to deter consumption.

A highly effective antidote (Vitamin K) is also available. Vitamin K will be available throughout the removal phase of the project. Tablets can be used as a maintenance dose for animals thought to be at high risk of encountering rodenticide (e.g. cats which are known to eat rats). For animals thought to have consumed rodenticide, or showing symptoms of rodenticide poisoning, one or more injections followed by daily treatment in tablet form may be required. Full information will be provided to residents.

All residents including children will be provided with information and shown the rodenticide and bait stations so they are fully informed about the project including any symptoms relating to consumption. Information will also be available for visitors, including those bringing pets. Following on from the excellent work carried out with St Agnes school, the project will engage with local schools on Tresco and St Martin's.

Local GPs and vets will also be made aware of the project. Handling rodenticide in itself presents a very low risk of poisoning, although every effort should be made not to inhale or consume dust. A full risk assessment is available for anyone handling bait and any bait encountered outside a bait station during the removal phase should immediately be collected and/or reported to the team with full details of its location.

Will there be any visual effects on the landscape in the long term?

A small network of bait stations on each island will remain in place as part of the surveillance strategy, aimed at detecting any surviving rats and any new arrivals. These will not normally carry rodenticide, instead relying on a non-toxic flavoured wax monitoring blocks. The bait stations themselves are designed to be low to the ground although they may be flagged to aid their location during the rat removal operation. Isles of Scilly Wildlife Trust bait stations remain in situ year-round on uninhabited islands with plans for the most conspicuous ones to be replaced over time with permanent wooden ones.

Were any other species affected by the bait on St Agnes and Gugh?

No. We have no evidence that any other species were affected by the rodenticide during the rat removal phase, and we searched very hard for any sign of ill-effect. Every precaution was taken to avoid unintentional primary or secondary poisoning and the whole operation was designed to minimise all risk.

Biosecurity FAQs

How will the islanders and the project team keep the islands rat-free?

The proposed project will need the long-term involvement of the island communities to maximise the chances of the islands remaining rat free. Measures to reduce the likelihood of an incursion include ensuring that high risk goods brought to the island (e.g. animal feed and hay) are checked

both on St Mary's and on arrival on the islands; ensuring good waste management; and at all times remaining vigilant for rat sign and encouraging all visitors to do the same.

Following the end of the poisoning phase, 100 permanent monitoring stations were left in place on St Agnes and Gugh and they are checked by community volunteers monthly. These stations house pieces of no-toxic chocolate wax which are very attractive to rats. If a rat does arrive on the islands they may be attracted to the wax and leave teeth marks which can be detected when the stations are checked.

If there is an incursion (detected through teeth marks, any other rat sign such as droppings or a sighting of a rat) the response will be to set up a 50m baiting grid in the immediate area. Special interpretation signs around the islands will let you know if there is bait on the islands.

If a rat comes back on a yacht or on some freight what will you do?

Biosecurity Plans for each island will be developed. Depending on the circumstances, this is likely to involve using traps and laying rodenticide again. If rodenticide is used, we will alert residents and place new signs at arrival points to advise visitors. The faster our response, the less rodenticide we are likely to need and the more likely we are to be successful. Any rodenticide laid will be done in a way to minimise risk to all other species, just as will occur in the poisoning phases of the project.

Vigilance will always be needed to prevent rats becoming re-established. The more islands in the archipelago that are rat free, the lower the chances of reinvasion. However, since most freight comes through St Mary's, where rat eradication is not currently considered a viable option, considerable risks will always remain. If rats do get back to any of the rat-free islands by yacht, freight or any other means, we will respond as rapidly as possible in accordance with the islands'

I want to know more about the biosecurity plans – what measures will you have in place?

A detailed Biosecurity Plan has been written for St Agnes and Gugh, focusing on keeping the islands free of rats, and further plans will be developed for the islands. These plans will detail measures that can be taken to prevent rats getting back to the islands (prevention), measures quickly identify if they do get back (surveillance), and a plan for what to do if a rat is detected or suspected (incursion response). Prevention involves checking all high-risk items that are brought to the islands, such as hay, animal fodder, building materials and fresh fruit and vegetables and alerting suppliers of these goods to the fact that these islands are rat-free.

Harbours, quays, and service boats will maintain bait stations and all boats should be checked regularly for rat sign, particularly after they have been taken ashore on islands with rats (for example, for maintenance work over winter). Surveillance involves monthly checks of non-toxic monitoring devices placed around the rat-free islands to search for any rat sign and general vigilance from both residents and visitors. Incursion response will depend very much on circumstances at the time of the rat incursion, but to be successful, it is vital that waste continues to be managed well on the islands - for example through changes to food waste disposal and other waste management improvements the project will support.

Updated 2023

Will this project remove mice too?

Mice are not present on every island and have a more limited ability to travel between and access islands. Removing mice requires a baiting grid far more intense to enable every mouse to interact with poison bait (20m x 20m) grid. There is limited evidence to suggest that the mice are impacting seabirds – the key conservation species for Scilly – in the same way as rats. The new feasibility study will look at mice on an island-by-island basis.