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2010: Cape in bid for more tourists than rats

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Plans are under way to give NGO Men on the Side of the Road R1,5-million to ensure that there are more tourists than rats in Cape Town during the 2010 World Cup.

This week a local radio station was flooded with rat complaints and the City of Cape Town's health department has warned that there is a big problem with common brown rats.

The national Department of Environmental Affairs has provisionally agreed to give Men on the Side of the Road R1,5m as part of its greening programme for 2010. A consultant with the department said it was now up to the NGO to come up with a business plan.

Founder of the project, Charles Maisel, has raised a few eyebrows in the past for his ideas on taking care of the vermin. He even received death threats for wanting to club them to death in a previous campaign. But this time round Maisel has indicated that he will work with the SPCA.

He said the department had agreed to give them the money and now they were drawing up a plan. "We need to find a nontoxic way of killing them. So we could use a similar trapping programme to the Robben Island rabbit problem, then euthanase them.

"The meat could then be processed for animal feed and for humans too. Rat meat is a high source of protein."

He said they would follow New York's lead by drawing up a rat map. This would identify problem areas, regions where the problem had been eradicated and sources of the problem. Squalid conditions in certain parts of the city and in informal settlements provide perfect breeding grounds for rats.

"An increase in the number of restaurants has fuelled the problem. You can try and clean up the station deck but if you don't deal with surrounding areas, it won't solve the problem."

The city said the Grand Parade, the station deck and Sea Point had been key problem areas. It spent over R300 000 a year dealing with the problem.

Dr Ivan Bromfield, executive director: City Health, said: "There is a significant rodent population in the city. Wherever you have dense human settlements, a steady supply of food waste, places where they can seek refuge - such as stormwater drains - and an absence of predators, rodents are likely to be found."

The city had baited an additional 1 140 points in the city during April and May, and would repeat this in September. "These are the peak breeding periods for rodents."

He said they damaged the city infrastructure by burrowing through bitumen paved surfaces, which required extensive maintenance. "We are calling on all sectors, but especially the restaurants and food outlets, to manage their waste correctly and to implement rodent control measures."

A number of factors had contributed to the problem. In the last decade, the number of informal settlements had increased significantly and the population of the city had increased.

There had also been a significant increase in the number of both formal and informal food outlets, but the refuse removal service in residential areas had been standardised to one collection a week.

Dr Andrew Tucker, a Tshwane vet, has been advocating for the pest control industry to use barn owls in an attempt to decrease the use of rodenticides around the country. Many rodenticides, if not used effectively, pose a threat to secondary predators and scavengers.

Tucker will be sharing his success with the project at the SPCA Pest Biz Convention in Cape Town on August 13 and 14.

The Urban Owl Box Project says an owl family of six could prey on 2 500 rats.

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Other big cities around the world have similar problems.

- UK newspapers recently warned that Britain was in danger of being overrun by super-sized "fat rats" which thrive on discarded junk food and are getting more protein in their diets. The common brown rat, *Rattus Norvegicus*, is getting larger and living longer by gorging on tons of left-over fast food. There are now as many rats in Britain as people, one report said.
- Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi awarded a British company a ?24-million (R305m) contract to deal with the country's rat problem, Sky News reported this week.

- This article was originally published on page 9 of [The Cape Argus](#) on July 25, 2009

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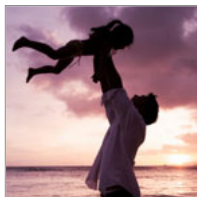
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