

# Giant, dog-sized rat documented in East Timor

## 東帝汶發現巨鼠 體型大如狗

Australian archaeologists have documented the remains of ancient giant rats the size of small dogs which were discovered in a **remote** East Timorese cave.

Ken Aplin of the Commonwealth Scientific and Research Organization (CSIRO) said the rats, detailed in the Bulletin of the American Museum of Natural History this week, grew up to 6kg — nearly the size of an adult Jack Russell.

The remains of the super-rats, three times the size of the largest living species, were among 13 types of **rodents** discovered during years of research in East Timor.

Aplin told AFP the rats lived there until 1,000 to 2,000 years ago, and were likely wiped out by changes in agricultural practices and habitat clearance.

"Large-scale clearing of forest for agriculture probably caused the extinctions, and this may have only been possible following the introduction of metal tools," said Aplin.

He said it was "a difficult sell, protecting rats," but that the finds are a reminder of the importance of conserving rodents.

"Rodents make up 40 percent of mammalian diversity worldwide and are a key element of **ecosystems**, important for processes like soil maintenance and seed dispersal," he said.

The largest living rats weigh around 2kg and live in rainforests in the Philippines and Papua New Guinea.

Aplin was optimistic that at least one undiscovered rat species might still be living in East Timor, much of which is **mountainous** and inaccessible.

"Although less than 15 percent of Timor's original forest cover remains, parts of the island are still heavily forested, so who knows what might be out there?" he said.

(AFP)



Top right: A combo photo released by CSIRO shows the entire skull of a common black rat, right, and the much larger incomplete skull of an extinct Timorese giant rat.

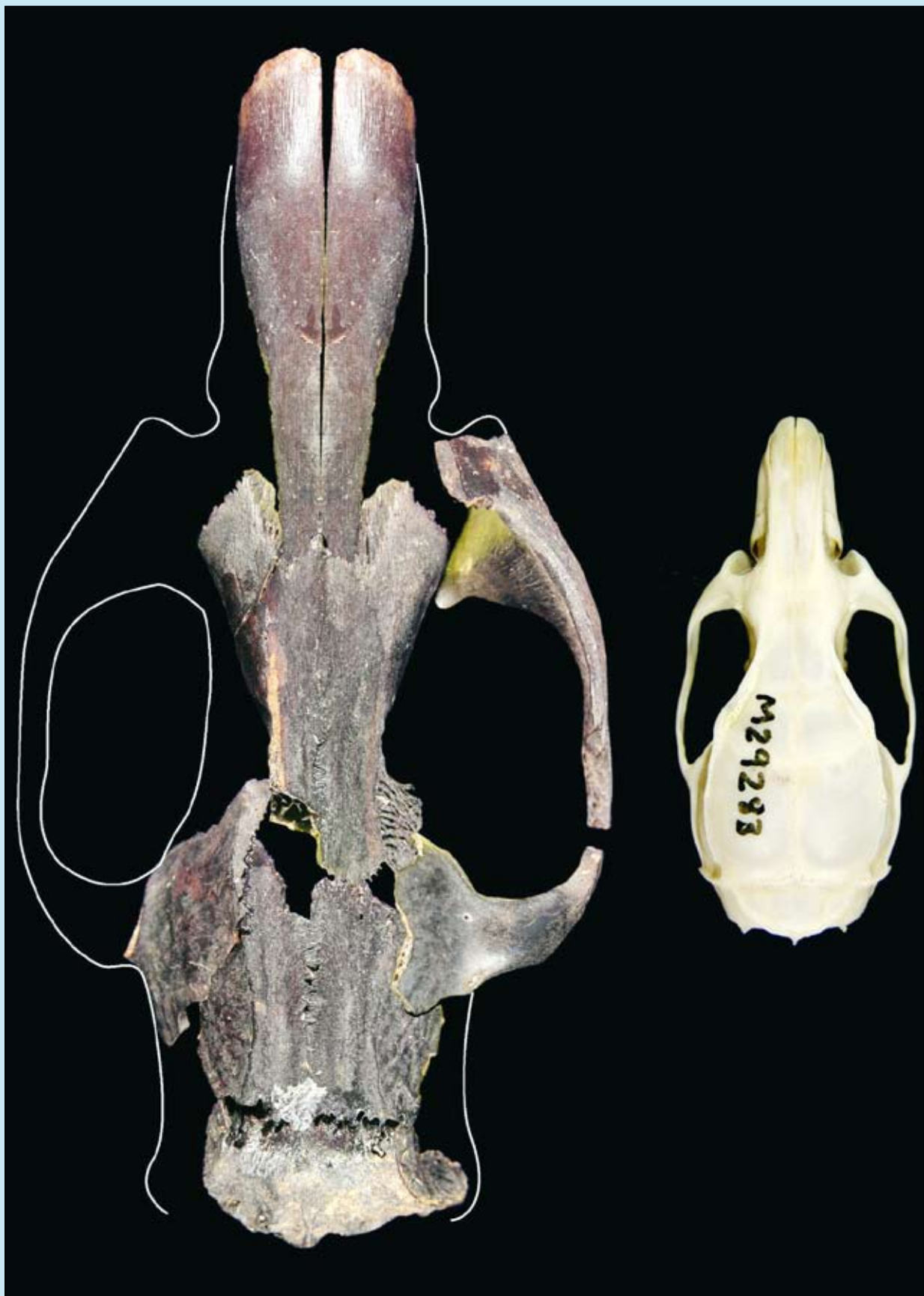
Above: An undated handout photo released by CSIRO compares the upper tooth rows of an extinct Timorese giant rat, left, with the entire skull of a common black rat.

PHOTOS: AFP/CSIRO/DR KEN APLIN

右上圖：這張澳洲國協科學與研究組織發表的組合照片中，右邊的是一般黑老鼠的顱骨，左邊那個尺寸大上許多的不完整顱骨，則屬於已滅種的帝汶大老鼠。

上圖：這張由澳洲聯邦科學與工業研究組織發表、拍攝日期不詳的照片中，將已絕跡的帝汶大老鼠上齒列（左）拿來與一般黑老鼠的完整顱骨對比。

照片：法新社 / 澳洲聯邦科學與工業研究組織 / 肯·艾普林博士



澳洲考古學家近日在東帝汶一個偏遠山洞裡，發現了大小有如小型犬的老鼠遺骸。

「國協科學與研究組織」人員肯·艾普林在本周的《美國自然歷史博物館公報》中詳細描述，這種老鼠體重可達六公斤，幾乎是一隻成年傑克羅素梗犬的大小。

除了這些體型為現有品種三倍大的超級巨鼠遺骸外，在東帝汶進行研究的這幾年還發現了其他十二種齧齒動物。

艾普林跟法新社說，這種老鼠活躍於一千至兩千年前，可能是因為農耕習慣變遷及棲息地消失而絕跡。

艾普林說：「為了耕作而大規模砍伐森林可能就是牠們絕跡的原因，而這只有在人類使用金屬工具後才可能發生。」

他表示，「說服他人保育鼠類並不簡單」，但這項發現對於保育齧齒動物具有提醒作用。

他說：「齧齒動物佔全球哺乳類的百分之四十，在生態運作上扮演要角，對於土壤保持及種子散播有重要的影響。」

目前最大的老鼠體重大約兩公斤，生活在菲律賓與巴布亞新幾內亞的雨林中。

艾普林樂觀的表示，可能還有未被發現的鼠種生活在人們未涉足的東帝汶山區。

他說：「雖然東帝汶原始森林的覆蓋面積不到百分之十五，但該島大部分地區還是林木茂密，所以誰知道裡面還藏著什麼？」

（法新社／翻譯：吳岱環）

### TODAY'S WORDS

#### 今日單字

1. **remote** /rɪ'mot/ adj.

偏遠的 (pian1 yuan3 de5)

例：The hikers got lost in a remote part of the forest.  
(登山客在森林偏遠處走失了。)

2. **rodent** /'rodnt/ n.

齧齒動物 (nie4 chi3 dong4 wu4)

例：The professor delivered a talk on rodent diversity.  
(教授針對齧齒動物差異性發表演說。)

3. **ecosystem** /'iko,sɪstəm/ n.

生態系統 (sheng1 tai4 xi4 tong3)

例：The construction project has destroyed a number of small ecosystems.  
(建設計畫破壞了一些小型生態系統。)

4. **mountainous** /'mauntɪəs/ adj.

多山的 (duo1 shan1 de5)

例：The troops marched for days through mountainous terrain.  
(部隊在山區行軍數日。)