

## **Rat-Free Rat Island Is Goal**

Rats on Rat Island – a rugged, uninhabited island that is part of Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge – will soon have had it, and sea birds will have a chance to return home. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologists are gearing up to eradicate the rodents from the island in the Aleutian Island chain, about 1,300 miles west of Anchorage.

More than 200 years ago, Norway rats came ashore to Rat Island when a Japanese ship ran aground. Rats, not native to North America, are voracious predators on birds, chicks and eggs. The rats changed the island from a predator-free sanctuary for ground-nesting sea birds into a death trap, and changed the makeup of the marine invertebrate community clinging to the rocks along the coastline.

The rat eradication plan, outlined in a December 2007 report, *Restoring Wildlife Habitat on Rat Island*, calls for a full-on aerial assault, including spreading pellet baits from specialized buckets mounted below helicopters. The team will hit every potential rat territory on the island, including all vegetated offshore rocks and islets. Overhanging cliffs and coastal areas that can't be reached by helicopter will be visited by biologists on foot.

Removing the rats promises to restore the functioning of Rat Island's natural ecosystem, giving the native vegetation a chance to recoup and setting up the return of nesting seabird colonies. Alaska Maritime Refuge has more than 50 years of experience in restoring native birds and ecosystems by removing introduced species. Although this will be the first rat eradication in Alaska, rats have been successfully eliminated from more than 300 islands worldwide.