



Dear Braintree friends,

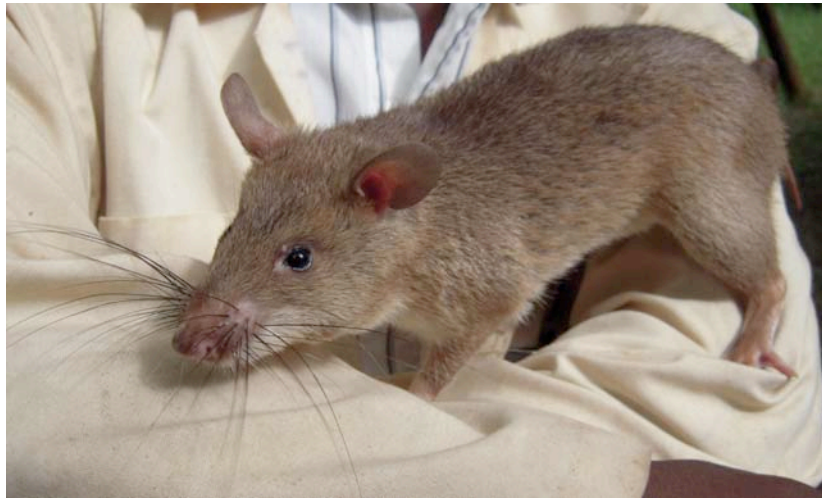
Hello there! How's life in your part of the world? Here in Tanzania, the grey clouds are looming above the mountains, and the grass at the training field is a little damp from a sprinkling of rain yesterday.

It's the beginning of the wet season, and us HeroRATs are not huge fans of getting wet or muddy. We like to keep our coats shiny, clean and dry, and if the grass is too wet then we spend a lot of our time giving ourselves a bath!

Since I last wrote, I've been spending lots of my time in the 'three meter' stage at the training field. Miraji is such a patient and gentle teacher, I feel very lucky to have him by my side. At the beginning of this stage, I kept sniffing around and passing over the TNT smell – but I couldn't quite pinpoint the exact location of the mine! I just knew it was there somewhere...

This stage has been very tough for me, especially at the beginning, because the scent is more complicated.

Up to this stage I have been trained on the scent of



pure TNT so that I would learn the scent very well. But this stage is the first time I have encountered real landmines. The TNT inside of them is old and has been exposed to the elements for years, it smells like the mine around it and the dirt too, so it is not as potent a smell and it is mixed with so many other smells...

Now, with Miraji's encouragement and plenty of practice, I'm confident enough in my senses to point out exactly where the mine is. I do this by scratching at the surface just above the mine. I have to make it pretty obvious to Miraji, and then I hear the 'click' sound and run back to him for a banana treat! Of course, the landmines buried at our training field have all been deactivated. But even in a real minefield, I'd be much too light to set off the mines (it takes about 5 kg to set off a landmine, and I only weigh 1.5 kg!)

After all this practice, Miraji said that I was ready for my big test, to see if I've developed the skills to advance to the next stage of training, which we call 'five meter'. It's similar to 'three meter' – only two meters wider! There are also less mines to find, and they are spaced further apart to really test my concentration.

We had to wait for a couple of weeks for a dry morning, to be sure I would be able to perform to the best of my abilities. I was nervous about the test, but also excited because it meant that I might be another step closer to my goal of working in a real minefield!

It finally came to testing day, and all my hard work and persistence paid off. Miraji came and told me the good news afterwards: I passed! He was so happy with my performance, he gave me the sweetest banana to munch on. My cheek pouches were so full! Now after all the excitement of testing time, I'm off to the HeroRAT kennels for a rat nap...



Thanks so much for your support in helping me to come this far. I'll keep you posted on how I go at the five meter stage, until then I send my best wishes from Tanzania!

Love & whiskers,



Sniffles the HeroRAT

P.S. We have a new website too! Check it out: www.herorat.org.