



Ratpile! That's me at the bottom, waiting for my turn at the reinforcement training field.

Dear friends,

How are things in Braintree? It's a very exciting time to be a HeroRAT in Mozambique, I can tell you! The warm weather is cooling down, and we have much to report from the minefields.

In fact, late last January, I had a surprise visitor! I was returning from the minefields after a hard morning's work, and was ready to rest in my cozy kennel for the entire afternoon. But when we returned to the training base camp, imagine my surprise when I saw Miraji's smiling face! That's right – Miraji, my trainer from Tanzania, who guided me from the earliest stages of socialization, all the way through to my final blind test. He will be here for six months, working with our Mine Action team and learning all he can, so he can bring his knowledge back to the training headquarters in Tanzania!

I was overjoyed to see him after so many months apart, and he was overjoyed to see me, too. We spent a long time catching up. Miraji told me of all the new developments in Tanzania – including training young HeroRATs for a new mine action program in Angola – and I told him about what he can expect from working in the real mine fields! Together, we have been very hard at work, and I am helping Miraji settle into the demining routine.

Mechanical teams, driven by humans, prepare the ground each and every day before it can be cleared. Then, manual deminers check the area with their metal detectors, and make safe lanes for the Mine Detection Rat teams (including yours truly!). Very early each morning – 5:30 AM! – we HeroRATs are safely placed in our transport cages and brought to the real minefields, where we carefully set our noses to work sniffing out landmines in side specially-marked “boxes” on the ground.

We are busy every day, but it's a good feeling, because APOPO's Mine Action team in Mozambique is almost complete with our task: demining our assigned areas in the Gaza Province by 2014. Once we've completed this Province, we are going to be able to hand the land back to the people of Gaza. I feel proud when I think of what they will be able to do with their land once it is returned to them, and when I think of the role I have had in giving it back to them.

My colleagues and I look forward to this day, and we know that with every morning of clearing boxes, we come closer to finishing the Province ahead of schedule. That's nothing to sniff at, and we couldn't have done it without your important help!

And for all of us on the team – human and rat alike – there's an important day coming up. That day is April 4th, which is the International Day for Mine Awareness! If you get a chance, spread the word to friends and family about your brave (and adorable) HeroRAT, Sniffles – and tell them that together, you and I are helping to make the world landmine-free, one sniff at a time.

Love and whiskers,

Sniffles the HeroRAT