

## Re: Old rats –

**Source:** <http://sci.tech-archive.net/Archive/sci.archaeology/2004-07/2720.html>

---

**From:** George ([gblack\\_at\\_hnpl.net](mailto:gblack_at_hnpl.net))

**Date:** 07/30/04

Date: 30 Jul 2004 13:45:59 -0700

n.beavan@gns.cri-dot-nz.no-spam.invalid (NancyB) wrote in message news:<4109c02c\$1\_1@127.0.0.1>...

> *Dear George, and Eric:*

>

> *(sigh)*

>

> *Eric: you said*

> *"Quote Abstract A consensus has not been reached on the validity of*

> *"old"*

> *(pre-Polynesian settlement) 14C ages for Pacific rat bones from New*

> *Zealand.*

>

> *Dead right"*

>

> *No, its inconsequential and a polite way to start an abstract.*

> *Consensus is seldom reached on issues where a paradigm shift is*

> *suggested.*

Eric did not write that. I did.

If you wish to post on the internet and have your posts accepted you have to attribute posts to their authors

> *However, the weight of data will support the probability of a certain*

> *observation being valid. And quite frankly, Holdaway and I and other*

> *co-authors have done a significant amount of well organised,*

> *documented and peer reviewed research which stands up rather better*

> *than responses which say "Its wrong." State actual reasons, show*

> *proof with data as to why previous data is wrong. Don't just suggest*

> *possibilities– show me why it is wrong.*

>

> *Prof Robert Hedges ( Oxford Radiocarbon lab) did a review of all the*

> *data, and processing and analysis. Did you miss that one? Hmm...*

> *it was right there, in the next issue.*

>

> <http://www.rsnz.org/publish/jrsnz/2000/24.php>

Not missed at all.

Again you are making assumptions

>

- > *His review of these procedures could find no reason that the ages*
- > *could be wrong with respect to processing and analysis.*
- >
- > *Then, its followed by another article once again saying "no, it*
- > *isn't".*
- >
- > *Again BIG SIGH. That's what we do as scientists: we construct a view,*
- > *we modify that view vis data, we argue in press and at mtgs with each*
- > *other and we get points for how robust our arguments are ( these*
- > *points not actually being redeemable for anything other than beers*
- > *from people who agree with you, however.)*
- >
- > *And you said:*
- >
- > *"Claim: That Rattus exulans has been present in New Zealand 800 years*
- > *prior to the Maori settlement of New Zealand..*
- > *Refutation 1*
- > *In 800 years of occupation of the two main landmasses of New Zealand*
- > *we have ?5' measurable samples of Rattus exulans"*
- >
- > *Uh, no -- I suggest you read on.*
- >
- >
- >
- > *"Refutation 2*
- > *Is/are there any 700 or 600 or 500 or 400 or 300 or 200 or 100 year*
- > *before Maori settlement Rattus exulans samples tested and written*
- > *up?*
- > *And instead of 5 samples of Rattus exulans I'd expect a database of*
- > *samples for North and South Islands populations as North Island and*
- > *South Island populations are claimed."*
- >
- > *Uh, no, again -- read on*
- >
- >
- >
- > *ALL I CAN SAY IS:*
- > *Do you boys really have no idea of the size of the database?*
- >
- > *EIGHTEEN North and South Island kiore dates were published in the*
- > *original Nature article ( Holdaway 1996, Nature 384 225–226.*
- >
- > *FIFTEEN dates are significantly older than the generally accepted*
- > *dates for human settlement.*

and that's it ? 800 years of rat in New Zealand and a database of 15 samples ?

- > *And yes, there certainly were a RANGE OF OTHER DATES PRODUCED.*
- >

- >
- > *As a fact, some 32% (n = 14) of subfossil rat bone ages produced*
- > *during 1995 to 1996 were determinations of less than 950 yrs BP.*

So , over a 2 year period 32% of all pre Maori kiore samples have appeared !

- >
- > *Analytical bias early in the series as cited by Anderson (2000) also*
- > *does not account for the accurate dating of a paired sample (bird*
- > *bone and moa eggshell) from Hukanui Slab (2995–/+72 and 2905–/+88*
- > *yrs BP respectively) in the series which included three ?old? rat*
- > *dates from the Ernescleu site.*
- >
- >
- > *Of the remaining ages greater than c. 950 yr BP produced in that*
- > *period, none of the results produced for those samples were thought*
- > *to be at odds with the stratigraphic situation in a given excavation*
- > *at a natural site (Holdaway et al 2002).*
- >
- > *YOU ALSO SAID:*
- > *"Holdaway (1996) asserted that sample NZA ? 6636 as recovered from*
- > *Hukanui #76 by J C Yaldwyn in 1959 is the one in the labelled*
- > *matchbox !*
- > *Subsequent excavations at this site (Hukanui) do not support the*
- > *claim ! The only rat bone taken from the site was a rat jaw bone*
- > *(lower*
- > *mandible)"*
- >
- > *ERIC, I know that you couldn't have known this, but to make a bald*
- > *statement instead of asking.... see below...*

Get the attributes right. That wasn't Eric. It was my comment. Sheesh

- > *and GEORGE offers a snark:*
- > *"Provenance. Lovely word that.It would appear that it has not had much*
- > *usage in this. A labelled matchbox containing 40 year old samples and*
- > *a site that yields no more of this bone....."*
- >
- > *George, I get samples submitted wrapped in rolling papers that have*
- > *been stuck into film caps. At least John Y had a clean matchbox,*
- > *labelled it clearly, and got it archived.*

It is obvious then that you find nothing strange about some-one 'finding' something that could change the New Zealand habitation record and he puts it away for 40 years ?

- > *John Yaldwin was very up front about the discovery of the bone when he*
- > *did excavate it. There is a sweet article from the time in which he*

sci.archaeology: Re: Old rats –

- > *states how he thought it was special, coming from under the Taupo*
- > *ash, and is quoted as saying, if only 14C technology could date such*
- > *a small sample.*

Yes. After the first article he was very quickly into print in the next magazine with his explanation

- >
- > *There \*\*\*were\*\*\* ounces and ounces, dozens and dozens of rat bones*
- > *taken from that area/site around that time, by those early*
- > *fossickers.*

Yeah ! Must be quite a trade in rat bone out there

- > *Unfortunately, they were all thrown into tea tins and tobacco pouches (*
- > *sez something about the provisioning of these field trips, ya think?)*
- > *and NOT labelled with any excavation information. That's what I saw*
- > *in a museum, and it was sad –They were pretty worthless as far as*
- > *what age they might be –*

Very true. However that is part of the training that the archaeologist should have caught up with. Proper identification of site, proper identification of where the various samples came from (photos, sketches, plans) and their proper labelling/packaging