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Rat's brain powers robot

Could help prevent Alzheimer's

by Katie Scott published on 14 August 2008

Scientists at the University of Reading are hoping to drive research into diseases such as Alzheimer's with a new robot, whose actions are driven by neurons from a rat.

The team has created a robot that is "powered" by 300,000 rat neurons.

As the BBC explains, this collection of neurons is now being taught how to steer the robot around obstacles within the pen it is being kept in (in case it tried to break out in search of cheese).

By studying how the neurons "learn" - the scientists hope to get some insight into how memories are formed and so may be able to use the research to help counter diseases involving memory loss.

"One of the fundamental questions that neuroscientists are facing today is how we link the activity of individual neurons to the complex behaviours that we see in whole organisms and whole animals", Dr Ben Whalley, a neuroscientist at Reading, told the Beeb.

"This project gives us a really useful and unique opportunity to look at something that may exhibit whole behaviours but still remains closely tied to the activity of individual neurons", he said.

Hit the button above for a video from those clever chaps at New Scientist explaining more...

