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NEXT YEAR PREVIEW 14 December 2016

# End of species extinctions is in sight as we bring animals back



**Hanging in there**  
Sumio Harada/Minden Pictures

By **Sandrine Ceurstemont**

Unleash the long-gone beasts. We won't see a woolly mammoth in 2017, but a host of schemes to bring animals back from the brink of extinction will kick in next year.

Genetic and stem cell technologies are on the cusp of letting us clone even infertile endangered animals when intact DNA is available. And some extinct species could be brought back by tweaking the genome of a living close relative. It should also be possible to engineer lost traits into a population.

One initiative involves the northern white rhino, which is now down to three infertile individuals living in Kenya. This year, a plan was announced to use stem cell technologies, frozen specimens and assisted reproduction to make new rhinos.

Similarly, genetic rescue could help the black-footed ferret (pictured), one of the most endangered mammals in North America, to make a comeback. The first in vitro experiments are set to begin in 2017, and will tackle inbreeding and disease resistance, because a type of plague and an untreatable virus are in danger of wiping out the animals.

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Another project is using gene editing to make a chimeric rooster of prairie chickens to help bring back their extinct relative the heath hen. If it works, they hope to revive the passenger pigeon next.

Woolly mammoths are a little further over the horizon. A project is under way to endow Asian elephant eggs with mammoth DNA. After the legwork is done over the next year, the first cloning attempts are scheduled for 2018.

*Jurassic Park* is still beyond us, but Pleistocene Park, full of ice age animals, might soon be a realistic dream.

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