



Photo from the Washington Post

Cross-posted at [CPRBlog](#).

The Washington Post [reports today](#) that scientists think they can resurrect the Pinta Island subspecies of Galapagos tortoise whose last remaining member, “Lonesome George” (pictured), died this summer. Scientists at Ecuador’s Galapagos National Park say they have found enough Pinta Island genetic material in tortoise on another nearby island that an intensive breeding program over 100 to 150 years could regenerate the pure Pinta Island subspecies.

It’s all very cool and sci-fi to think we might be able to regenerate extinct species (does anyone besides me remember Jurassic Park?). But from a policy perspective, the question is not can we do it, but *should* we? It’s the kind of question we’ll have to face more and more, with climate change radically changing the world’s habitats. What exactly do we want to conserve, and what level of resources are we willing to put into conservation or into conserving one entity possibly at the expense of others further down the list?

We can’t answer that question without thinking a lot harder about why we think conservation is desirable. Are we trying to save “nature” in some sense, and if so is a deliberately human-bred species natural in the sense that matters or not? Or in a slightly different context, should we be moving pikas or other species from areas that are or soon will be no longer suitable habitat to areas outside their historic range that might become suitable?

I don’t pretend to have the answers to those questions. In fact, I don’t think any one person should be expected to answer them, or should suppose that they alone have the definitive answer. As Alejandro Camacho, Jason McLachlan, Ben Minter and I [wrote a couple of years ago](#), we need a multidisciplinary national or global conversation on conservation goals. Whether Lonesome George should be given virtual children is as good a place to start that conversation as any.