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## Pleistocene Rewilding

Rewilding, or introducing species to their former habitats, has been practiced since the 1990s in efforts to restore wilderness areas and revive animal populations. One example is the reintroduction of beavers, which were hunted to extinction in the United Kingdom around 400 years ago, into an area of Scotland. By cutting down trees and building dams on streams, beavers create habitats for numerous other animals. Not surprisingly, then, reintroducing them has had only a slight effect on areas.

Ecologist Paul S. Martin, who died in 2010, was a proponent of a more controversial idea called Pleistocene rewilding. He believed descendants of large mammals, such as lions and camels, should be reintroduced to areas where their ancestors roamed during the Pleistocene epoch, which ended roughly 11,700 years ago - a time when populations of many large mammals were in decline. In cases where such animals had become extinct, Martin proposed reintroducing their close ecological equivalents - for example, elephants in place of mammoths. According to Martin, these mammals played a key role in the evolution of most plant and animal species. Consequently, ecosystems where these mammals are no longer found have become unbalanced.

Some scientists, however, say Pleistocene rewilding could have significant drawbacks. Programs to monitor interactions among species would need to be established, and secure fencing would be required to protect people and livestock from potentially dangerous animals. Both of these steps would involve major economic costs. What is more, since the end of the Pleistocene epoch, many ecosystems and species have evolved dramatically. Reintroducing species into such altered environments could have a destabilizing effect.