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The Search for “Extinct” Species

What happens when a species previously believed to be extinct resurfaces?

Species can be suspected extinct when they disappear for long periods of time. Sometimes, to everyone’s surprise and delight, “extinct” species resurface. The [Global Wildlife Conservation](#) (GWC), a non-profit based in Texas, has initiated a “[Search for Lost Species](#)” program. Its mission statement is to “**rediscover 1200 species in 160 countries that have not been seen in at least 10 years.**” The leader of this project is herpetologist **Robin Moore**, who successfully conducted a similar initiative in 2010 called “Search for Lost Frogs.” In 33 expeditions, Moore’s program rediscovered 15 species within the first year alone.

The notion of rediscovering a species that was declared extinct may sound like the plot of an adventurous movie, however, a 2001 article titled [Trends in Ecology and Evolution](#) indicates that in addition to the discovery of new species, there are roughly 3 rediscoveries of species a year. Rediscovery is indeed a real possibility. In 2011, Island Conservation inadvertently rediscovered [Rábida Land Snails](#) and [Rábida Geckos](#) on Rábida Island after removing invasive rats during a [Galápagos](#) restoration project.

Determining a species' conservation status requires continuous population counts, which are not always accurate. **John Zablocki**, a graduate student currently researching this rediscovery phenomenon, explains that scientists' surveying capacity is minuscule compared to the overall scale of the planet. Sometimes only a population of a species is observed to be extinct, and the term is inaccurately applied to the entire species, when in fact a few individuals remain.

To aid in their search, GWC is using several different technologies to pinpoint ideal locations to find a persistent species:

1. **eDNA Sampling:** Environmental DNA sequencing. GWC specifically uses this technique in bodies of water to determine if certain amphibians or fish are present.
2. **iDNA Sampling:** By sequencing the DNA of invertebrates, such as mosquitoes or leeches, scientists can determine what animals were sustaining them.
3. **Google Earth:** Scientists utilize high-resolution capture provided by Google Earth to create maps used to identify ideal environments for species.

The rediscovery of a species is thrilling, and for many people offers a rare example of positive news in the conservation sphere, where news overwhelmingly features current environmental problems.

By taking on this project, Moore hopes to:

Remind people that there is a lot worth fighting for, and that the world is a wild and mysterious place

GWC will send scientists into the field in search of the **25 "Most Wanted Species,"** a range of organisms that include the Pink-headed Duck of India, the Fernandina Galápagos Tortoise, the Himalayan Quail, and the Wondiwoi Tree Kangaroo.

GWC collaborated with artist Alexis Rockman to make a poster of the "25 Most Wanted Species."

Credit: [Alexis Rockman](#)