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# Pleistocene Rewilding of the Bahama Islands

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## Abstract

Rewilding is the restoration of extinct species - or their ecological surrogates - to their former habitats. Not only does rewilding restore species (or their surrogates) to their former range, but it restores the ecosystemic services of those species. In the Bahamas examples have been the introduction of hutias (*Geocapromys ingrahami*) to the Exuma Cays and the release of confiscated (and therefore possibly disease-infested) rock iguanas (*Cyclura rileyi*) to cays off of San Salvador. The hutias dramatically transformed the vegetation of their new habitats, likely because of the absence of an extinct predator, *Tyto pollens*. The iguana transfer was conducted for epidemiological reasons; rewilding was the byproduct. Extant relatives of extinct Pleistocene species have the potential to be rewilded in the Bahamas. Examples are the Isabela Island giant tortoise (*Chelonoidis vicina*), which is the closest living relative to the extinct Bahamian tortoise *Chelonoidis alburyorum*; the Cuban crocodile (*Crocodylus rhombifer*), which the historical and fossil record shows to have been widespread throughout the Bahamas; and the Hawaiian monk seal (*Neomonachus schauinslandi*), which would be an ecological surrogate for the extinct West Indian monk seal (*N. tropicalis*), last seen in the mid-Twentieth Century. There are controversies, risks and virtues attendant to the rewilding of these species.

**Keywords:** rewilding, extinct species, ecological surrogates, Cuban crocodile, monk seal, extinct Bahamian tortoise

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