

We might be able to clone mammoths, but should we?

I'm a paleobiologist at the [Natural History Museum](#) in London, and I live, sleep and dream mammoths. I doubt that there are many people in the world who would like to see a real-life woolly mammoth as much as I do. And yet I think cloning one would be ethically flawed.

Any attempt to clone a mammoth would probably require a living elephant – likely to be Asian – to act as a surrogate. To go through 22 months of pregnancy, carrying an animal of a completely different species as part of the experiment. An intelligent, social animal, at the brink of extinction, and one we know doesn't do all that well in captivity.

And not just one elephant. In reality, many surrogates would be needed before a successful baby mammoth was born.

There are very good reasons for using animals in scientific research, but there are also strict ethical codes of practice that demand that the potential benefits of the research outweigh the suffering to the animals involved.

Does the potential benefit to humanity of cloning a mammoth outweigh the suffering an Asian elephant surrogate mother might experience? I've yet to hear a convincing argument that it does.

So, why should we clone a mammoth? Because it would be cool to see one? That's not going to cut it, I'm afraid.

Because it advances technology and the sum total of human knowledge? OK – but why a mammoth? Why not some other extinct creature that could be born of a surrogate better suited to life in captivity, or one that requires no animal surrogate at all? Church's group are also trying to bring back the passenger pigeon, for example, and here it's only the eggs that are manipulated in the lab. Granted, that's not possible for mammals, but maybe a mouse would be a better starting point. For some reason, however, cloning an obscure species of extinct rodent doesn't seem to capture the imagination.

Read full, original article: [Mammoths are a huge part of my life. But cloning them is wrong](#)