

DNA exonerates humans for giant sloths' extinction, climate change to blame

New forensic DNA evidence is painting a detailed picture of the death of the world's megafauna – and it suggests that humans were not to blame.

Ever since a [giant sloth was uncovered more than 200 years ago](#), hinting at the former presence of a menagerie of prehistoric giant mammals – the “megafauna” – humans have been on trial for their extinction. And the prosecution's case has been strong.

“The overwhelming evidence is that the megafauna extinctions occur around the world whenever humans turn up,” says [Alan Cooper](#), an ancient DNA researcher from the University of Adelaide in Australia.

But the real culprit, he says, is climate change.

Cooper and colleagues have simultaneously produced an unprecedentedly accurate map and timeline of changes in megafauna populations around Eurasia and North America, and precisely matched that timeline up with ancient climate records.

It punches a hole in a key argument of the prosecution. This states that climate cannot have caused megafauna extinctions because it has changed so much over the past 60,000 years. There were lots of warm and cool periods – interglacial and glacial epochs, respectively. If climate change is the real megafauna killer, why did the animals survive those events only to die when humans turned up in their region?

The new data show that they did not survive. Megafauna extinctions were actually relatively common during the past 60,000 years whether humans were around or not.

The GLP aggregated and excerpted this blog/article to reflect the diversity of news, opinion and analysis. Read full, original post: [Megafauna extinction: DNA evidence pins blame on climate change](#)