

Viewpoint: 'We've made a mess of our planet with our meddling.' Should we engineer animal species to set things right?

We've made a mess of the planet with our meddling. Now, thanks to biotechnology, we have tools... to repair it. Should we use them? Molecular biologist Beth Shapiro thinks so.

For instance, we could engineer species' genomes "to help them adapt to drier soils, more acidic oceans, and more polluted streams"; to create 'gene drives', systems that override natural selection in invasive species to wipe them out; and even to resurrect extinct species. Synthetic biology could help to solve some of our biggest problems, from hunger to the climate crisis, and look after other species, too.

We are the planet's caretakers, Shapiro argues in her book *Life as We Made It*, and "it's time to embrace this role".

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Her expansive survey of the hopes and fears — and the hypes and fails — of genetic manipulation is an enjoyable tour of 'impossible' species created to solve pressing human problems. We visit hornless cattle, flavour-saving tomatoes, golden rice, malarial mosquitoes gene-edited to spread sterility, yeast genetically engineered to produce a synthetic 'blood' for tasty veggie burgers, endangered ferrets cloned to help save the species from extinction, and more.

[Editor's note: [Find Life as We Made It here.](#)]

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