

Correspondence

Fund natural-history museums, not de-extinction

The only way to study extinct species is by leveraging the irreplaceable collections of natural-history museums. It is unfortunate, then, that instead of supporting these often imperilled institutions, private investors are spending millions on attempts to resurrect species. For example, the US start-up firm Colossal Laboratories and Biosciences, co-founded by synthetic biologist George Church, is exploring such feats.

Museum collections have helped to arrest extinctions of birds of prey (J. J. Hickey and D. W. Anderson *Science* **162**, 271–273; 1968) and have documented local extinctions of small mammals (O. R. W. Pergams and S. Nyberg *J. Mammal.* **82**, 984–992; 2001). They have also provided biologically inspired design for myriad fields and insight into how humans erode biodiversity. Yet museums are often underfunded and understaffed (see go.nature.com/3agsnzb).

Diverse sampling of life over time means that natural-history collections hold answers to many unsolved conservation questions (F. Grewe *et al. Biol. Lett.* **17**, 20210123; 2021), some of which are only now being revealed by new technology. With so many species teetering on the edge owing to climate change, habitat loss, pollution, pesticide use and more, philanthropists should invest in stopping their demise instead of trying to bring back species that are already lost.

Corrie S. Moreau Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, USA.
corrie.moreau@cornell.edu

Jessica L. Ware American Museum of Natural History, New York City, New York, USA.