

Smart Stuff

with Twig Walkingstick

Q. Dear Twig: What did you mean, 'Bring back the mammoth'? Is someone going to bring back a mammoth?

A.: Eh, probably not. At least, not anytime soon, if ever.

Scientists in Russia and Japan are trying to do it. They think if they can find **DNA** (the **genetic material** of cells) from a not-too-eaten, not-too-rotten, nicely frozen mammoth they can do it — they could **clone** a new mammoth (make an identical genetic copy of one). But for now that's a really big if. You could say it's even a mammoth one.

Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha!

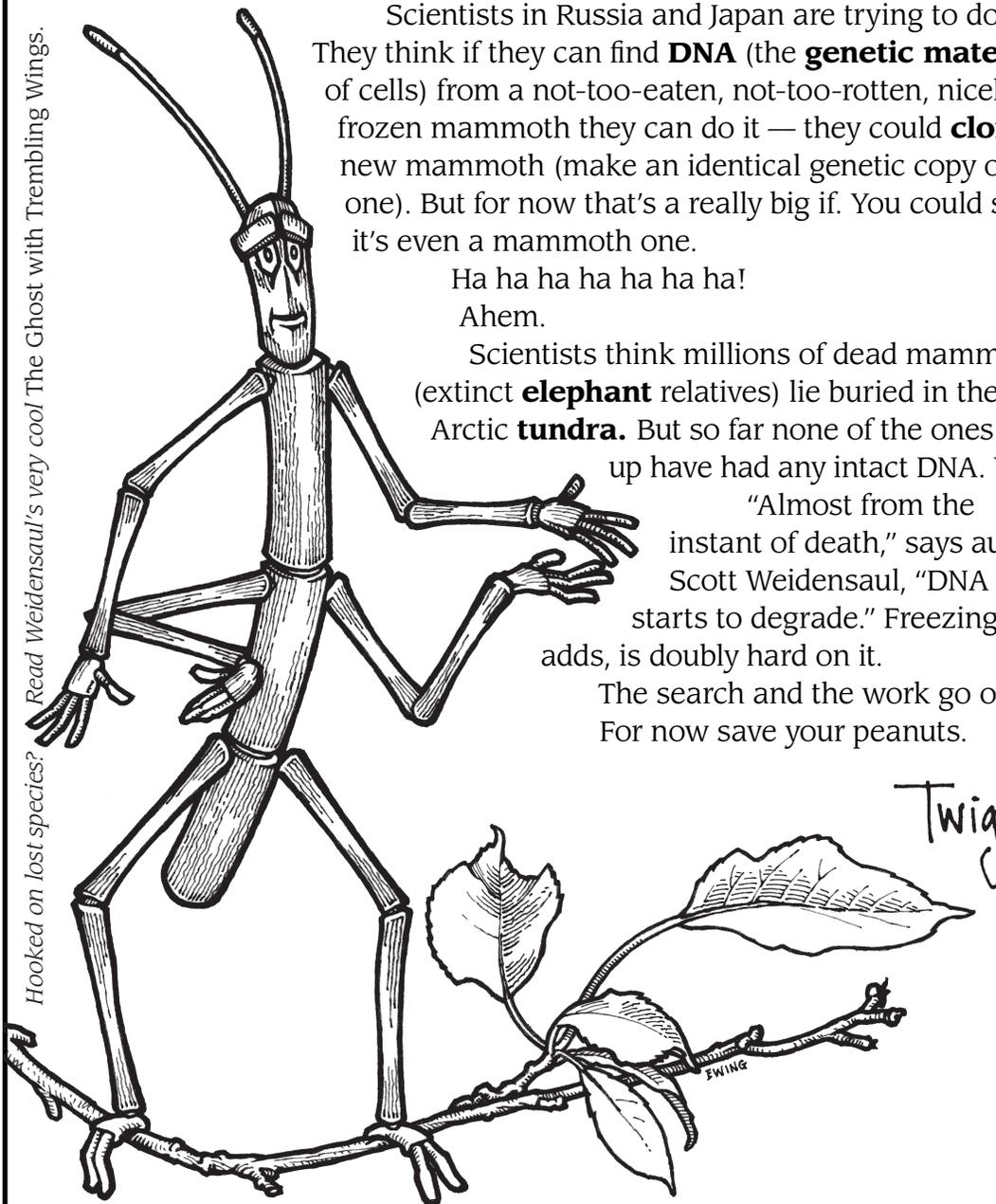
Ahem.

Scientists think millions of dead mammoths (extinct **elephant** relatives) lie buried in the cold Arctic **tundra**. But so far none of the ones dug up have had any intact DNA. Why?

"Almost from the instant of death," says author Scott Weidensaul, "DNA starts to degrade." Freezing, he adds, is doubly hard on it.

The search and the work go on. For now save your peanuts.

Read Weidensaul's very cool *The Ghost with Trembling Wings*.
Hooked on lost species?



Twig

From your scientific friends at The Ohio State University — specifically, the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center (www.oardc.ohio-state.edu) and OSU Extension (extension.osu.edu).



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Notes: Twig's past three entries (four, counting this one) have been about Ice Age megafauna. Get caught up at <http://www.ag.ohio-state.edu/~news/archive.php?series=science>. Sources this time included Weidensaul's *Ghost with Trembling Wings* (North Point Press, 2002); BBC News, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/3075381.stm>; and National Geographic News, http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2005/04/0408_050408_woollymammoth_2.html. For more about Ice Age megafauna and what happened to it, try *The Call of Distant Mammoths* by Peter D. Ward (Springer, 1998).

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