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Scientists seek Lonesome George's tortoise kin

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By Julie Steenhuisen



CHICAGO (Reuters) - Lonesome George, a giant Galapagos tortoise thought to be the last of his kind, may not be so lonely after all, with the discovery of a possible cousin, researchers reported on Monday.

Lonesome George is famed for his status as the sole surviving member of a species of giant tortoise from Pinta Island, one of the Galapagos Islands off South America.

He has spent the last 35 years at the Charles Darwin Research Station on the island of Santa Cruz, sharing a pen with two similar-looking female tortoises from Pinta's neighbor, the volcanic island of Isabela.

But so far George has shown no interest in mating -- even though they brought in virile young males of the same species as the females to demonstrate.

"The future looked pretty bleak for Lonesome George up to now," said Adalgisa Caccone, a biologist at Yale University in Connecticut who helped lead the research.

Now, he might have a first cousin on Isabela, Caccone said in a telephone interview.

Caccone and colleagues at Yale have discovered a tortoise that is the offspring of a pure Pinta male that bred with a female on Isabela.

"This is the first time that an individual that carries as much as 50 percent of the genes from the same population (as) Lonesome George has been found," she said. [Continued...](#)

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