



Lonesome George: The Life and Loves of a Conservation Icon

Henry Nicholls

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Lonesome George is on the stamps and the banknotes of the Galapagos Islands. He is a 5ft long, 90 kg tortoise aged somewhere between 60 and 200. In 1971 he was discovered on the remote island of Pinta, from which tortoises had supposedly been exterminated by greedy whalers and seal hunters. He was carted off to his current home, the Charles Darwin Research Station (CDRS) on Santa Cruz. He has been there ever since, on the off chance that there is a Pinta female somewhere, or that scientific ingenuity will conjure up a way of reproducing him, and resurrecting his species and the Pinta population. Meanwhile millions of tourists and dozens of baffled scientists have looked on as George shows not a jot of interest in the female company provided.

In *The Life and Loves of a Conservation Icon*, Henry Nicholls details the efforts of conservationists to preserve the Galapagos' unique biodiversity and illustrates how their experiences and discoveries are echoed worldwide. He explores the controversies raging over which, if any, mates are most genetically appropriate for George and the risks of releasing crossbreed offspring into the wild. His is a story that draws together the islands' geology, evolution and history of human exploitation. It features strong characters, from Charles Darwin to cloning pioneer Ian Wilmut to the beautiful Swiss graduate who spent four months trying to persuade George to have sex. Nicholls' book is about discovery, wildlife, scientific conflict and the environment but will also appeal to the travel market. Some 80,000 tourists visit the Galápagos Islands each year; all drop in on George.

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