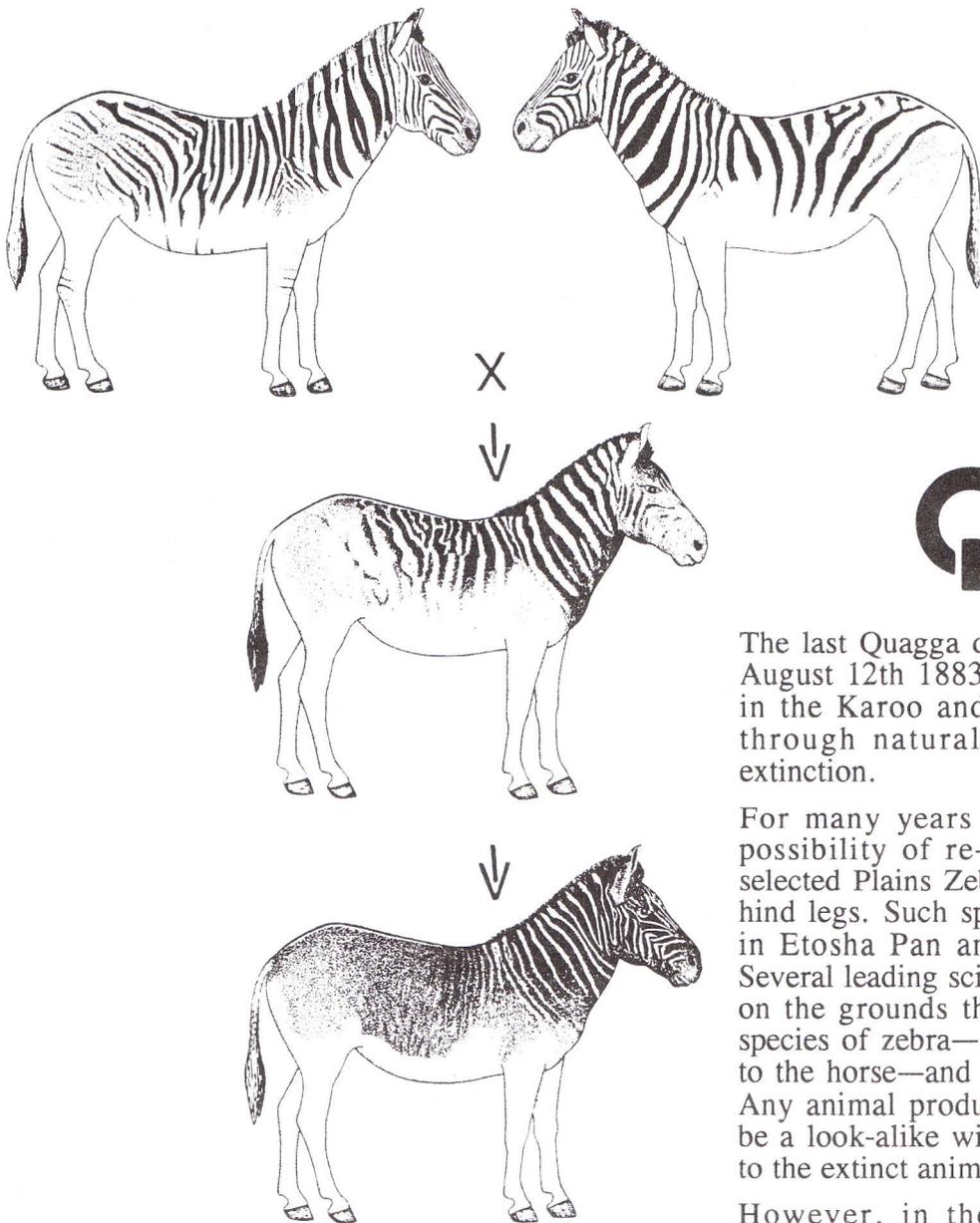


**HELP US**

# Bring back the Quagga



The last Quagga died in the Amsterdam Zoo on August 12th 1883. The Quagga, once abundant in the Karoo and Free State, did not die out through natural causes but was hunted to extinction.

For many years scientists speculated on the possibility of re-breeding the Quagga, using selected Plains Zebras that lacked striping on the hind legs. Such specimens are occasionally seen in Etosha Pan and northern KwaZulu-Natal. Several leading scientists were against this project on the grounds that the Quagga was a distinct species of zebra—some said more closely related to the horse—and could thus not be 're-created'. Any animal produced, they said, would merely be a look-alike with no true genetic relationship to the extinct animal.

However, in the early 1980s, Californian scientists subjected tissue samples from museum specimens of the original Quagga population to

molecular studies. Proteins and portions of mitochondrial DNA were extracted and compared with those of the living Plains Zebras. These studies revealed that the extinct Quagga was one of several subspecies of the Plains Zebra. This of course means that the main gene pool is still available, and that those genes responsible for the Quagga's reduced striping and brownish colour might still be present and retrievable in present-day southern populations of Plains Zebra. Based on this scientific evidence a committee of various scientists and other interested persons was formed in Cape Town in 1986 to start a selective breeding programme—the Quagga Project. The first nine zebras were selected at Etosha Game Reserve, Namibia, during March 1987, and transported to the Western Cape. More selected zebras were obtained during the following years, from both Etosha and KwaZulu-Natal.

It is expected that continuous selection of the most Quagga-like individuals from successive off-spring generations will eventually produce individuals that match the preserved specimens from the original Quagga population. Results to date are very promising indeed.

Some of the Quagga Project zebras were released into the Karoo National Park in 1998. Their appearance approaches that of the extinct Quagga, but the striping needs further reduction and the basic colour needs to become more brownish before future individuals will match the original Quaggas. This re-introduction of the 'Quaggas-to-be' into the heart of the former Quagga's distribution area marks an important milestone in the endeavour to bring back the Quagga.

As the Quagga Project receives no state-funding, we would appreciate contributions towards this scientifically interesting project, which also has great ethical value since it aims to rectify the short-sighted and shameful extermination of the Quagga.

Visit the Quagga Project web site: <http://www.museums.org.za/sam/quagga/quagga.htm>

Contributions may be sent to: Quagga Project Association, South African Museum,  
P.O. Box 61, Cape Town 8000.