

# Gene editing could erase entire species

**Rhys Blakely** Science Correspondent

A genetic-editing technique that has the potential to wipe out entire species has been made to work in mammals for the first time.

The advance, reported in the journal *Nature*, could lead to "gene drives" being used to eradicate invasive rodents from island habitats.

The technique typically involves editing the DNA of a small number of animals to force a genetic mutation

into the population. It had already been used in experiments to make mosquitoes infertile, leading organisations including the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to explore whether it could help to wipe out malaria.

The technology could be used in Britain to eliminate grey squirrels, according to some scientists. Critics warn, though, that gene drives could wreck ecosystems. The US military has reportedly investigated the technology, spending \$100 million

(£76.5 million). In the new study, researchers at the University of California used a genetic variation to turn the fur of mice white. Females passed down the variation at an elevated level, while males did not.

Scientists said that a hurdle had been cleared. Bruce Whitelaw, of the University of Edinburgh, said that it "demonstrates mammalian gene drive for the first time and starts to clarify the aspects and limitations of the process".

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