

Dead as a Dodo

On Mauritius, an island in the Indian Ocean, there once lived one of the most odd-looking birds you could imagine. The dodo was three feet tall and weighed about fifty pounds. Its stomach dragged on the ground when it walked, and its wings were useless stubs. The first explorers to mention the bird were Dutch and Portuguese sailors in the early 1500s. The Dutch sailors called the birds *dodoor*, which means "slow."

Dutch settlers followed, bringing with them various pets and farm animals. The poor dodo had no natural enemies before humans arrived, so it had developed no ways to defend itself. It couldn't fly. It couldn't climb trees. It couldn't even run very fast. Therefore, it became an easy source of food. The settlers killed and ate the adult birds. The animals they brought attacked young birds and ate the eggs. By 1681, the last dodo on Mauritius had been eaten. A few more had been sent to Europe, but afterward these died, too. Only one stuffed dodo remained, in a museum in England.

In 1755, even the stuffed dodo disappeared when the museum's directors voted to toss it out with the trash. A worker at the museum kept the head and one foot, but the rest was gone forever.

Many paintings had been made of the dodo, but they all looked so ridiculous that people began to doubt that it ever existed. Written descriptions of the bird didn't sound too convincing either. No stuffed birds and no skeletons existed. Did the bird ever inhabit Mauritius? Scientists in 1800 couldn't be sure. Someone figured out that bones from dead dodos might have washed down a river and become stuck in the mud where the river emptied into the ocean. Sure enough, with a lot of digging, searchers discovered many bones in 1863. They were put together into skeletons and sent to museums everywhere.

The calvaria major, a beautiful kind of tree on Mauritius, had depended on the dodo. Its hard seeds produced new trees by being softened, and the seeds could be softened only by passing through the dodo's strong stomach. However, the tree was able to hold on for 300 years. Then, in 1977, a scientist brought turkeys to Mauritius. The turkeys arrived just in time to do the work that dodos had once done; there were only thirteen trees left.

1. Which of these things happened first?
 - (A) Dutch and Portuguese sailors mentioned the dodo in the early 1500s.
 - (B) Turkeys were brought to Mauritius.
 - (C) The stuffed dodo disappeared.
 - (D) Dutch settlers brought pets and farm animals to Mauritius.
2. When was the dodo last used as a source of food?
 - (A) in 1598
 - (B) in 1681
 - (C) in 1755
 - (D) in 1800
3. What happened after the last dodo disappeared?
 - (A) Many paintings were made immediately.
 - (B) People began to doubt that it had existed at all.
 - (C) Stuffed dodos were sent to museums.
 - (D) Settlers left Mauritius.
4. Which of these things happened last?
 - (A) The only stuffed dodo was thrown into the trash.
 - (B) Someone dug up many dodo bones from the mud in a river.
 - (C) Scientists argued over whether the dodo had really existed.
 - (D) Dodo skeletons were sent all over the world.
5. Which of these things happened first?
 - (A) Turkeys saved the calvaria tree.
 - (B) The last dodo died in Europe.
 - (C) The last dodo on Mauritius was eaten.
 - (D) Dodo skeletons were sent all over the world.

