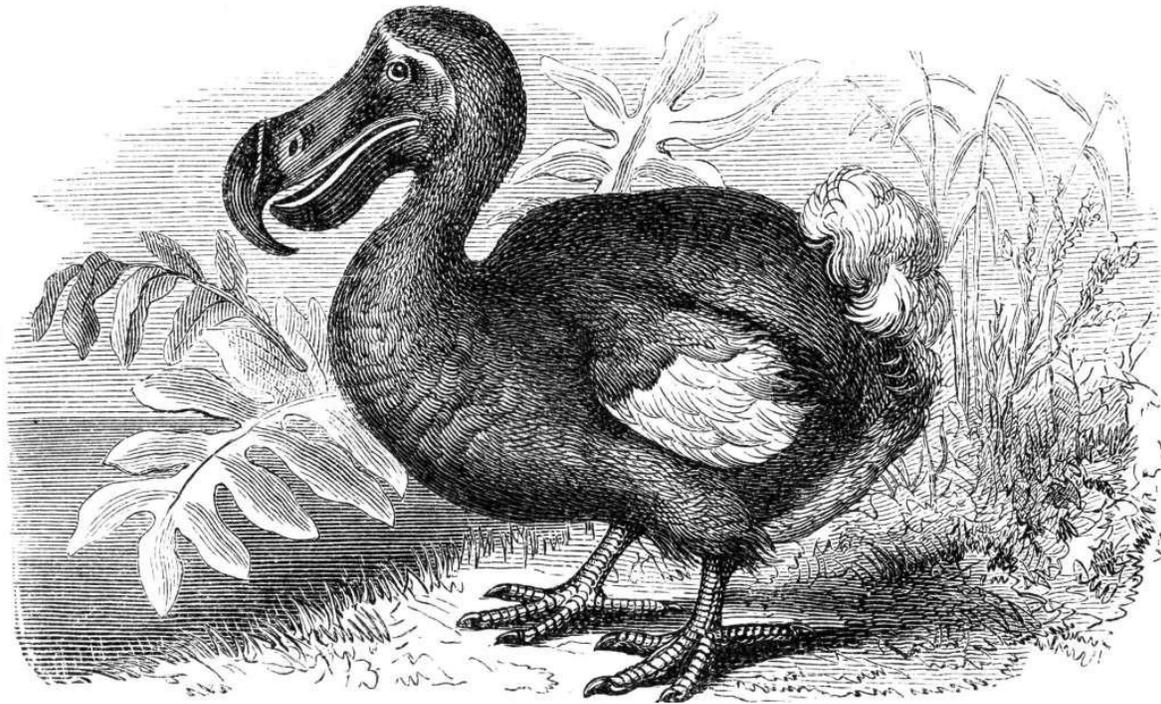


What Happened to the Last Dodo?



Answer by Stefan Pociask, wildlife researcher/rehabber, on Quora:

The fate of the poor dodo bird is slightly misrepresented by history. It seems “common knowledge” that all dodos were hunted down by European visitors, because they were slow and had no innate fear of humans. This is only partially true. It wasn’t the main reason for their extinction. The truth is more tragic. So here’s the rest of the story, of how we got to the very last dodo bird.

Yes, the sailors hunted down many of the trusting birds simply by walking up to them and picking them up or using a machete on them. This in itself is a very sad story, since there was nothing “stupid” about the dodo (as they are infamously but wrongly known). They were just trusting of humans because they’d never seen any other animal that was able to hurt them in any way. Fearless curiosity, rather than stupidity, is a more fitting description of their behavior. One can only imagine what they were thinking when the tall two-legged visitors began massacring them.

Yes, many were collected by the Dutch sailors and settlers, but there was something else that had a larger impact on their eventual extinction, invasive animals that the sailors brought with them on their ships; namely, rats, cats and pigs that went feral. There were never any rats on the island until they came with the ships and came ashore. Sailors always had a way of letting pigs or goats escape on various islands they visited. Cats were brought as working “pets.” So pigs and rats flourished in the wild, as they also had no natural enemies there. They actually sealed the fate of the dodo by eating all the dodo eggs they could find that were all on the ground in the simple unprotected dodo nests. The mother dodo would only lay one egg per season. It didn’t take long for the production of new baby dodo chicks to take a very steep decline. None of the nests were

safe from foraging wild pigs and a multitude of newly introduced rats. The dodo as a species didn't have a chance at that point, and they were doomed. Even those that had nested in remote places, soon had their young chicks or eggs consumed by the invaders.

If it weren't for these marauding animals, the dodo may have been able to survive the onslaught of just the sailors and settlers hunting them on the 800 square miles of Mauritius. Many even became more cautious of human hunters, and adapted their behavior. It's small consolation, but it is known that many of their hunters were bloodied by the dodo's enormous hooked beak, in perhaps what was their last act of defiance. So yes, they did fight back. But there was no way to hide the nests and chicks from the pigs and the rats. The gentle trusting dodos paid the ultimate price. "The Last Dodo" may very well have been a single lonely chick or egg somewhere in the jungle, that a scurrying rat came upon and decided to feast unaware that he or she, after a million years' journey, was the last, the very last of them all.

This happened a mere 80 years after the first dodo to see a human come upon its peaceful shores, fearlessly and with simple, innocent curiosity waddled up to observe the new visitors and was slaughtered where he stood.

If dodos had never gone extinct, the word "dodo" would probably not have entered our lexicon as a derogatory word. "Dodo" probably would not have taken on the meaning of "dumb". In a world with dodo birds, I suspect the word dodo would have meant *peaceful*, or *curious*. Perhaps it would have meant *friendly*, as in "Thanks, mate! That's right dodo of you!"

