

As dead as a dodo

1. What do you know about dodo birds? Have you ever seen one? Perhaps you've heard of one in the story of *Alice's adventures in Wonderland*?
2. You can't have seen one because the dodo bird has been extinct for over 300 years. This is why we say that something is 'as dead as a dodo', meaning *really* dead.
3. Even when it was alive, this large bird only lived in one isolated place, so it was only seen by a few people. There were some people who believed it was a mythical creature, a bit like the mermaids sailors reported seeing. But we do know dodos really did exist and we have a good idea of what they looked like. This is because there are old descriptions and drawings still available and some dodo bones and even an egg have also been found.
4. The first time dodos were recorded by humans was about 1598 when Portuguese sailors visited the island of Mauritius in the Indian Ocean. The name 'dodo' is believed to have come from a Portuguese word meaning 'dumb'. These strange birds were given this name because they couldn't fly and weren't at all frightened of humans. They were very easy to catch and kill, but their flesh was tough and it wasn't very tasty.
5. Dodos are related to pigeons from South-East Asia. Their wings changed and became shorter as they didn't need to fly on Mauritius. This was because there weren't any predators there and there were plenty of the seeds and fruits they liked to eat on the ground. Dodos were large greyish birds with white tail feathers and a large hooked beak. They grew to about one metre in length and weighed about 20 kilograms.
6. There has been a lot of concern that these poor creatures became extinct after less than one hundred years of human contact. They were not only easy for humans to catch, but the pigs, dogs, rats and other animals people brought to Mauritius with them became the dodo's predators too.
7. Dodos were believed to be clumsy and fat, but this may not be true. Many dodo drawings were made of birds kept in cages. Dodos in their natural environment were probably much thinner, less clumsy and more active.

