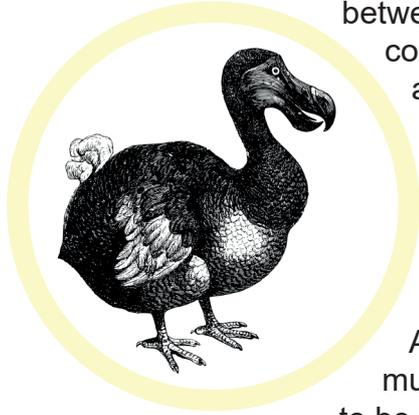


## The Dodo

Most people are familiar with the extinct bird called the dodo. Its squat and plump appearance is very recognisable. But you might be surprised to know that scientists don't know exactly what a dodo would have looked like.

### IT'S ALL IN THE DRAWING



Many drawings of dodo birds exist, but there are lots of differences between them all. One theory is that dodos moulted once a year and completely changed their appearance. Another is that many of the artists never actually saw a dodo and were drawing based on what other people told them. The dodo was driven to extinction in the 17th century, so any drawings from when they were alive are over 300 years old. Many of the people who did see the dodo weren't trained in scientific illustration, either.

For a while, a stuffed dodo bird was on display at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford. Unfortunately, in 1755, the museum's director decided that it was getting musty and ordered it to be burned. An employee managed to save the head, but very little else. That is all that remains to this day.

### WHAT DO WE KNOW?

Scientists know surprisingly little about the dodo bird. It lived only on the small island of Mauritius and was the largest-ever member of the pigeon family. It couldn't fly, which meant that it had to nest on the ground. When explorers arrived with pigs, dogs and monkeys, their eggs were easily snatched and destroyed. The animals also hunted the dodo; it had no natural predators and was unable to defend itself.

Most of the drawings and written accounts from the 1600s say that the birds were roughly 30 inches tall and plump. Apparently, they didn't taste very nice when cooked. It is known that they were very easy to catch. It was reported that if you caught one dodo, its cries for help would bring all of the other dodos in the area out for hunters to grab.

Other than that, scientists are unsure. They don't know what the birds ate or what sound they made. Nor do they know what type of habitat they preferred.

### HUMAN IMPACT

From discovering the dodo to hunting it to extinction took humans only 70 years. The animals that sailors brought to Mauritius killed significant numbers, particularly their eggs. Even though they didn't taste very nice, the settlers still hunted the birds for sport.

Some birds were transported back to London to be put on display in zoos. In fact, the earliest known picture of a dodo was from Emperor Rudolph II's zoo in Prague, drawn in 1610. The last known example of a dodo kept in captivity was in 1647 in Japan.

It is most likely that the dodo bird was extinct in the wild by 1683, and it was definitely extinct by 1693.

The largest living member of the pigeon family is now the Victoria crowned pigeon. It is roughly the same height as a dodo but weighs much less. Its numbers are falling in the wild, and it is classified as Near Threatened.



**1**

a) When were dodo birds **most likely** extinct by?

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1 mark

b) What was one reason for them becoming extinct? Use evidence from the text to explain why this caused them to die out.

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2 marks

**2**

Look at the section headed: ***What Do We Know?***

**Find** and **copy a phrase** that shows that there were no animals on the island that would eat the dodo, before humans arrived.

---

1 mark

**3**

Using information from the text, tick one box in each row to show whether each statement is **true** or **false**.

	True	False
Dodos couldn't fly.		
Dodos were a type of pigeon.		
Only part of a stuffed dodo remains.		
Dodos attacked settlers.		

2 marks

**4**

Look at the first paragraph.

Which two words would best describe a dodo bird?

Tick **two**.

Tall

Short

Green

Heavy

---

2 marks

**5**

What is unique about the Victoria crowned pigeon?

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1 mark

**6**

Give **one reason** why drawings of dodos might be inaccurate.

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1 mark

# SATs Practice - Answers

1. a) 1683  
b) **Give 1 mark for a correct reason, and a further mark for a correct explanation.**  
**Either:**  
*Settlers brought animals to Mauritius*  
*The animals ate the dodo bird's eggs, because they nested on the ground.*  
*The animals hunted the dodos and ate them.*  
*The dodo had no natural predators so was unable to defend itself.*  
**Or:**  
*The settlers hunted the dodo*  
*They hunted the birds for sport.*  
*They ate it, even though it didn't taste very nice.*
2. No natural predators
3. **Give 1 mark for two correct answers. Give 2 marks for three or more correct answers.**  
True  
True  
True  
False
4. **Give one mark for each answer.**  
Short  
Heavy
5. It is the largest living pigeon.
6. **Either:**  
*The artists weren't trained in scientific illustration.*  
*Some artists hadn't seen the dodo.*  
*Do not accept: The drawings were from 300 years ago.*