

Doom on you! Doom on you! - bringing back a semblance of the DODO!

Initially planned to recreate the mammoth and the Tasmanian Tiger, attention is turning to the Dodo.

Native to Mauritius, it became extinct in the mid to late 17 century. They were not afraid of humans. They approached the Dutch sailors who found them easy prey. They were about 1 m tall and weighed between 15 and 20kg. They laid one egg which was preyed by monkeys and rats brought inadvertently in ships.

The dodo has caught the imagination of generations of children, authors, and environmental scientists. Alice in Wonderland, Lewis Carroll's novel of 1865 brought back the wonder of the dodo. Several serials followed with the dodo as the star. The latest was the Ice Age movie where Dab the dodo prophetically states "If you weren't smart enough to plan ahead, then doom on you".

The optimism arises from the fact that in 2002, scientists extracted a tiny piece of the bird's mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) that gets passed down from mother to offspring. This showed that the dodo's closest living relative was the Nicobar pigeon. By 2022, the dodo's entire genome was recreated.

But the path from genome to a living, breathing animal remains formidable. Still once created, instinctive behaviour, which is determined by genetic programming, and social behaviour which is learned from parents and their group. These conditions will be absent in the recreation of the dodo. (NS)