NEWS LESSON

The Bird That Would Not Quite Be a Dodo



BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. Which extinct animal would you most like to see alive?
2. Would you visit a place to see an animal created by scientists?
3. What makes an animal worth protecting?

2 Key words

These words are in the article. Write the letter of the meaning (A to H) in each box.

1	**genome**	☐	A	all the genetic information of a living thing
2	**flightless**	☐	B	no longer alive anywhere in the world
3	**extinct**	☐	C	all the living things in an area and how they affect each other
4	**habitat**	☐	D	very, very big
5	**ecosystem**	☐	E	the natural place where an animal or plant lives
6	**resurrection**	☐	F	not able to fly
7	**resources**	☐	G	money, time and materials that you can use
8	**enormous**	☐	H	the act of bringing something back to life

3 Read

Read the article and underline the key words from task 2. The paragraphs are numbered.

Colossal Biosciences has rebuilt most of the dodo's genome and hopes to edit a Nicobar pigeon. Critics ask what the finished bird would actually be.

1 The dodo has been extinct for more than three centuries, yet it may be one of the most recognisable birds in history. The large, flightless creature once lived on Mauritius, where hunting and animals introduced by humans helped to wipe it out. Now a US biotechnology company wants to create a living bird with some of the dodo's distinctive features. Whether that would count as bringing the dodo back is another question.

2 Colossal Biosciences announced fresh progress in October 2026. The company said it had reconstructed about 95% of the dodo's genome, the collection of genetic instructions that helped determine how the bird developed. It is also using an AI-assisted system to pick out changes linked to features such as the dodo's unusually shaped beak. Researchers hope to introduce selected changes into the genes of a living relative, the Nicobar pigeon.

3 This is where the idea becomes complicated. The Nicobar pigeon is not a dodo, even though the species share an evolutionary history. Changing some of its genes could eventually produce a bird that looks or behaves more like the extinct species. But it would not necessarily recreate the original animal, complete with the same behaviour, development and place in the ecosystem. Colossal has not yet produced a living dodo or dodo-like bird through this programme.

4 Supporters argue that research into gene editing and reproduction could produce tools useful for conservation. If scientists become better at protecting genetic diversity or helping endangered birds reproduce, living species may benefit. The company is also working with people in Mauritius to explore how suitable habitat might be restored. Without a safe environment, even an impressive scientific achievement would have little chance of surviving outside a laboratory.

5 Critics question the priorities. De-extinction projects attract publicity and investment partly because famous animals are involved. Meanwhile, many less glamorous species are disappearing right now. Some researchers also object to the word 'resurrection', which suggests an exact return that current technology cannot deliver. They argue that a genetically modified relative would be a new creation rather than the original species brought back to life.

6 The dodo project is only beginning to take shape and remains an experiment with an uncertain outcome. Its value may eventually lie in techniques developed along the way rather than in producing a perfect copy of an extinct bird. Even so, the ambition forces us to confront an uncomfortable question about conservation. If we can spend enormous resources trying to reverse one historic loss, how much should we spend preventing the ordinary, less famous losses taking place around us today?

Sources: Reuters. Picture: AI illustration.

4 True, false or not given

Circle **T** (true), **F** (false) or **NG** (the article does not say).

1. The project is funded mainly by the Mauritian government. T F NG
2. Colossal says it has rebuilt almost all of the dodo's genetic code. T F NG
3. Colossal is cooperating with Mauritians to prepare places where birds could live. T F NG
4. Colossal has produced a dodo-like bird through the programme. T F NG
5. Researchers who object to the word 'resurrection' think it describes the technology accurately. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed.

achievement	ambition	campaign	confront	distinctive	priorities	publicity	recreate

1. Landing a probe on a comet was widely praised as a great _____ , and the team received awards.
2. The dodo had several _____ features, including an unusually shaped beak.
3. The film received a lot of _____ before its release, which helped it sell tickets.
4. Her _____ is to become the first person in her family to run a company.
5. After the argument, he decided to _____ his manager and explain how he felt.
6. Doctors must decide their _____ when many patients arrive at once.

6 Verb forms

Write the correct form of the verb in brackets.

1. By October 2026, the company _____ most of the dodo's genome. (RECONSTRUCT)
2. The dodo _____ extinct for more than three centuries. (BE)
3. Without safe habitat, any released bird _____ little chance of surviving in the wild. (HAVE)
4. The word 'resurrection' _____ by some researchers because it suggests an exact return. (CRITICISE)
5. If scientists _____ better at protecting genetic diversity, living species may benefit. (GET)

7 Language focus: collocations

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. Some verbs go with certain nouns for no logical reason. We raise funds and reach a conclusion, but we do not make them.

attract	do	face	make	pay	raise	reach

1. The company hopes to _____ funds from investors to continue the project.
2. Famous animals _____ more attention than quiet, ordinary species.
3. Any attempt to restore a lost species will _____ enormous practical challenges.
4. After years of debate, scientists have yet to _____ a firm conclusion.
5. A gene-editing breakthrough could _____ a real contribution to wildlife protection.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

Discuss in pairs or small groups. Give reasons for your answers.

1. Would a bird that looked like a dodo count as bringing it back?
2. Would you spend more on protecting living species or recreating extinct ones?
3. Could the promise of bringing animals back make extinction seem less serious?

9 Role-play: where should the money go?

Work in pairs. Your wildlife charity has £50,000 to spend. Read your card, then have the conversation. Swap roles and do it again.

Student A · the colleague who wants to protect living birds

You want to spend the money on a nature reserve for birds in danger today. Explain why. Ask your partner what they would really get for the money.

Student B · the colleague who likes the new science

You want to give the money to research that tries to bring back a lost animal. Say why it could help. Listen to your partner's worries and try to agree a plan.

Useful phrases

I'd rather spend it on animals we can still save.
That's a fair point, but it's worth the risk.
What would we actually get for the money?
I don't think it's one or the other.
Could we split it between the two projects?
We're running out of time, so let's decide.

Afterwards, tell the class: where did the money go, and who gave way?

ANSWER KEY

2 Key words

1 A · 2 F · 3 B · 4 E · 5 C · 6 H · 7 G · 8 D

4 True, false or not given

1 NG · 2 T · 3 T · 4 F · 5 F

5 Vocabulary

1 achievement · 2 distinctive · 3 publicity · 4 ambition · 5 confront · 6 priorities

6 Verb forms

1 had reconstructed · 2 has been · 3 would have or will have or has · 4 is criticised or has been criticised or is being criticised · 5 get or become

7 Language focus

1 raise · 2 attract · 3 face · 4 reach · 5 make

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