



The Song of the Dodo: Island Biogeography in an Age of Extinction

By David Quammen

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David Quammen's book, *The Song of the Dodo*, is a brilliant, stirring work, breathtaking in its scope, far-reaching in its message -- a crucial book in precarious times, which radically alters the way in which we understand the natural world and our place in that world. It's also a book full of entertainment and wonders.

In *The Song of the Dodo*, we follow Quammen's keen intellect through the ideas, theories, and experiments of prominent naturalists of the last two centuries. We trail after him as he travels the world, tracking the subject of island biogeography, which encompasses nothing less than the study of the origin and extinction of all species. Why is this island idea so important? Because islands are where species most commonly go extinct -- and because, as Quammen points out, we live in an age when all of Earth's landscapes are being chopped into island-like fragments by human activity.

Through his eyes, we glimpse the nature of evolution and extinction, and in so doing come to understand the monumental diversity of our planet, and the importance of preserving its wild landscapes, animals, and plants. We also meet some fascinating human characters. By the book's end we are wiser, and more deeply concerned, but Quammen leaves us with a message of excitement and hope.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

In a wonderful weave of science, metaphor, and prose, David Quammen, author of *The Flight of the Iguana*, applies the lessons of island biogeography - the study of the distribution of species on islands and islandlike patches of landscape - to modern ecosystem decay, offering us insight into the origin and extinction of species, our relationship to nature, and the future of our world.

From Publishers Weekly

Quammen (*Natural Acts*) has successfully mixed genres in this highly impressive and thoroughly enjoyable work. The scientific journalism is first-rate, with the extremely technical field of island biogeography made fully accessible. We learn how the discipline developed and how it has changed conservation biology. And we learn just how critical this field is in the face of massive habitat destruction. The book is also a splendid example of natural history writing, for which Quammen traveled extensively. The Channel Islands off California and the Madagascan lemurs are captivatingly portrayed. Equally impressive are the character studies of the scientists who have been at the forefront of island biogeography. From his extended historical analysis of the journeys and insights of 19th-century biologist Alfred Russell Wallace to his field and laboratory interviews with many of the men and women who have followed in Wallace's intellectual wake, Quammen delightfully adds the human dimension to his discussion of science and natural history. Using a canvas as large as the world, he masterfully melds anecdotes about swimming elephants, collecting fresh feces from arboreal primates in Brazil and searching for the greater bird of paradise on the tiny island of Aru into an irreverent masterpiece. That a book on so technical a subject could be so enlightening, humorous and engaging is an extraordinary achievement. Author tour.

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From Library Journal

The self-contained ecosystem is again used as a benchmark in this study of evolution and extinction by the author of *Natural Acts* (LJ 3/15/85).

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