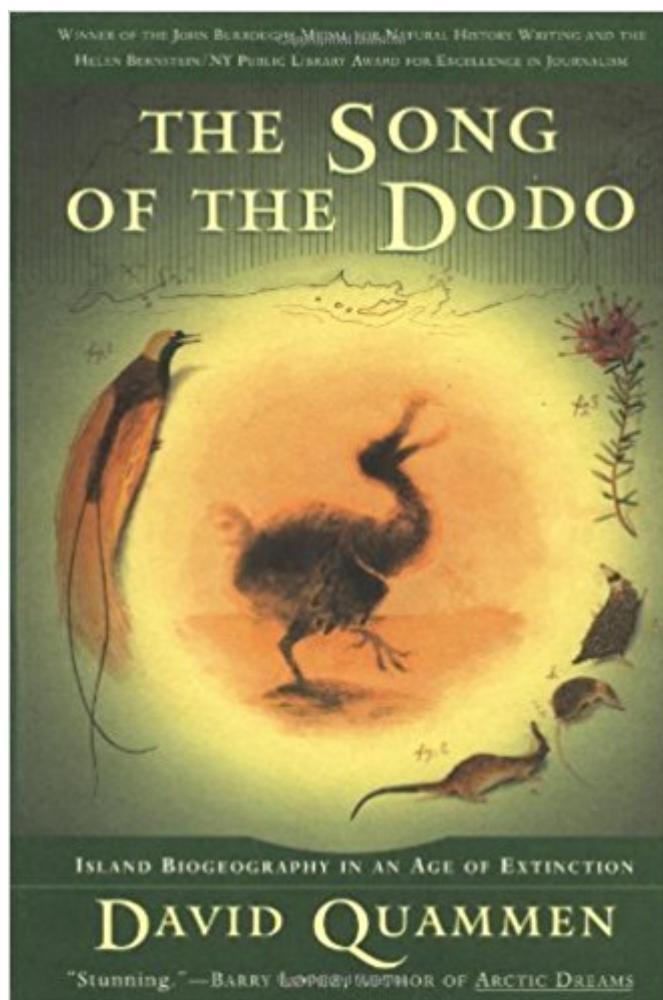


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The Song Of The Dodo: Island Biogeography In An Age Of Extinction



Synopsis

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.

Book Information

Paperback: 704 pages

Publisher: Scribner; Reprint edition (April 14, 1997)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0684827123

ISBN-13: 978-0684827124

Product Dimensions: 6.1 x 1.3 x 9.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.9 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars 141 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #65,106 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #18 in Books > Science & Math > Nature & Ecology > Endangered Species #170 in Books > Science & Math > Biological Sciences > Ecology #221 in Books > Science & Math > Earth Sciences > Geography

Customer Reviews

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. --This text

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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. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

If I knew what "tour du force" meant, it is probably something one could reasonably say about this book. Great read. A pleasurable meandering through an interesting and important topic for species conservation. If you prefer books that are short and to the point, then this probably isn't for you. At over 600 long pages, it does take Quammen an exceptional number of words to get to a fairly concise and concrete point. In fact, early in the book (chapter 2 maybe) he spoils the ending and that one sentence spoiler basically says it all. That said, the book as a whole does a very admirable job in walking through a variety of very interesting and informative material to reinforce the entire concept for the inevitable premise to which it is all directed. The book reads as a part history, part travelogue, and part science text, with a little humor and a lot of introspection thrown in to round it out. Read this expecting the journey instead of a tailored economy of words in service of the thesis, and enjoy it as you go. Quammen is engaging and this is a very good read.

This book was not exactly what I was expecting. That's what I get for not doing my book/author research in the first place. Science writer and travel journalist David Quammen has written a rather

long book on conservation biology. Using Island Biogeography as a jumping-off place, the author outlines its varied concepts like: archipelago speciation, equilibrium theory, land-bridge islands and the founder principle. He also explains how these concepts tie in with dry land "islands" such as national parks and isolated patches of forest or other environments. Utilizing science journals, interviews with working scientist and the hands-on approach of traveling to far-flung biological hot spots like the rain forest, islands like Madagascar, Komodo and Tasmania, Quammen puts it all together in his version of the "Inconvenient Truth". I really enjoyed the first part of the book as it spotlighted islands and how life somehow managed to gain a foothold on them. The biographical segment on naturalist Alfred R. Wallace made for fascinating reading but it was here I ran into my first problem with Quammen. As most people know Wallace was a contemporary of Charles Darwin and both were credited with coming up with the concept of Natural Selection. Was Darwin completely honest in his dealing with Wallace? The controversy rages to this day with scientist and historians falling into one of two camps--Darwin was honest and did the right thing when he found out about Wallace's theories or Darwin was dishonest and tried to hide and/or even stealing segments of Wallace's theory. There is no real evidence available one way or the other. While Quammen claims to be neutral on the subject it soon became clear to me that he fell squarely into the second camp. I found many of his comments to be inappropriate and even a little offensive. Darwin was no saint, nor was he a devil and the same holds true for Wallace. They were just human and as such were subject to the same mistakes and failings that we all are. The other turning point in the book was the sudden switch from Island Biogeography to Social Science with a long segment on the cultural history of the Tasmanian Aborigines. While that was interesting in its own right, for me it was the subject for another book and not the one I was currently reading. In the latter half of the book I grew weary of the endless run of interview after interview on how various working biologist felt about the Equilibrium Theory or how the SLOSS Theory applied to their particular field of study. For me this book was a big disappointment. The final decision to buy or not to buy is, of course, yours. Any review is just the reviewers opinion so it a good idea to read several of them, both pro and con, then take the plunge (think of the famous feline alluded to in my review title). As for my recommendation? If, after you've done your home work, you're still undecided you may want to borrow the book from your local library. If you read it and don't like it, then nothing's lost but your time. If you do like it and want to add it to your collection then go for it (if I had followed my own advise I would have saved the price of this book). I had no technical problems with this Kindle edition. LastRanger

A good historical survey of island biogeography. Also surveys contemporary examples that illustrate current problems. Perhaps the most important aspect of the book is that it really impresses on the reader the significance of the information gleaned from this historical overview and hopefully inspires the reader to support solutions to the decimation of these islands of refuge. It is, however, a bit technical in its approach and is not recommended for someone totally unfamiliar with the subject area.

Quammen is truly becoming one of my favorite authors. As a naturalist, the topics he writes about are interesting to me, but that's only a fraction of his charm. He also has a very anecdotal and "friendly" writing style that I find very engaging. How can I not be charmed by a man who concludes his chapter on biogeographic logarithms with, "Hello, are you still with me? Sorry about all that." He knows his audience. It took me a long time to read this book not because it wasn't interesting, but because it covered a wide-range of related topics. It was as if several good books had been rolled into one. The book focuses on biogeography. Quammen talks about the great people who've contributed to the field (beginning with Darwin and Wallace, of course,) and also talks about island extinctions (as they have been much more numerous than continental extinctions). I found the stories about Darwin and Wallace fascinating. The chapters on rare, extinct, and (unfortunately) introduced species were the best part of the book for me. He also talks about recent studies and debates like SLOSS. Then Quammen ends the book with his own trip to Aru after years of carrying around a copy of Wallace's *The Malay Archipelago*. My one criticism is in regards to the Kindle edition due to the page numbers and percentage. When I finished the book, it said I was only 60% done even though the chapters before the glossary end around page 600 out of 695. That's not 60% Kindle. I recommend this book to anyone with interest in islands, habitat carrying capacity, and the history of natural sciences. It's a sober topic and an eye-opening read, but Quammen throws in some of his charm and wit as needed and expected.

I was surprised by how long this book is - I was expecting it to just skim over extinction of a few species and make its conclusion. Instead, it is a thorough and detailed account of the history and the science behind the natural world today. Great for both the people who know a lot about natural science and those who are simply curious. This book reads more like a good blog than a report, with opinions and personal experiences of the author included among the drier retelling of scientific theories. I would highly recommend it - don't be afraid of its thickness, because you won't be able to put it down.

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