



Leni is nuts about birds. She knows every kind that lives on her beautiful, bountiful island nation of Mauritius. She can tell just from a tail-feather or a squawk whether it's a pink pigeon or an echo parrot, or one of any number of beautiful tree-top dwellers. She even has her own faithful talking parakeet friend, Popcorn, who makes repeat appearances ("who makes repeat appearances"). Leni also knows a lot about the Dodo – the most famous Mauritian bird ever. She has grown up on her grandmother's hand-me-down stories of the strange flightless bird with the big beak and fluffy football-shaped body. But it's sadly extinct. Never to be seen again...

But one day two rival professors come to stay on Mauritius, and both of them are hunting the same thing: Dodo DNA. They want to use their ingenious scientific techniques to de-extinct the dodo and bring it back to life! Leni can hardly believe her luck, and right away offers to be their island guide. She quickly becomes involved in the adventure, running between the scientists as they race to perfect their de-extinction machines. But there are others who want to be involved too. And while these shady characters like to preen, they're not exactly bird-lovers. Because, while the professors are busy hatching chicks, an evil sugar magnate by the name of Benny Shooper, and his ugly entourage are hatching a plan to re-extinct the de-extinct Dodo.

This is a gobble-in-one-go joyful breeze of a book with a brilliant plot, fascinating facts and a hell of a lot to laugh at.

The characters are bitingly funny – from greedy bling-man Benny Shooper and his revoltingly self-obsessed wife, to the little and large henchmen you'll love to hate, and the professors, one scatty and the other meticulous (and both equally competitive). Even the side characters, such as the cleaning ladies, are fun to be around. Put them all together with one of the best story premises I've seen and it's a side-splitting adventure which tumbles with fun and personality.

And there's a lot more besides. The author gives a snide side-eye to

greedy corporations that destroy wildlife habitats for profit and really rockets home the importance of preserving native species. The descriptions are magic – tropical and rich, with just enough detail – and I'm booking my trip to Mauritius just as soon as I can. In addition to a great story, the illustrations are stand-alone fantastic and a perfect fit, being simple but packed with charm. And even when the adventure reaches its conclusion, the book just keeps on squawking. There's dodo facts, a quick quiz, and dodo jokes, too. Just in case you didn't laugh enough (which I promise you won't be the case). Fiona Sandiford's effortless humour will win over kids who like their adventures plucky and very, very funny.

**REVIEWED BY SNORT
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