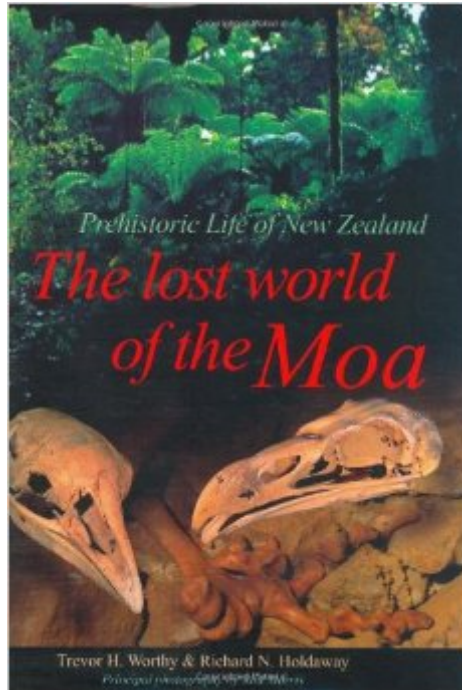


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The Lost World Of The Moa: Prehistoric Life Of New Zealand



Synopsis

This book investigates one of the richest and most unusual faunas in the world, one that thrived in isolation for 80 million years, but that over the past 2000 years has been reduced to a shadow of its former glory. It was a fauna dominated by birds. In one of the most dramatic extinctions of modern times, half of these species were removed from the planet forever. Among these lost animals was the giant, flightless bird, the moa, an evolutionary novelty that was one of the largest birds ever known. In this definitive volume, Trevor H. Worthy and Richard N. Holdaway summarise all that is presently known about these incredible birds. The authors present the various species of moa, describe their skeletons, and reconstruct their life and ecology. Then they discuss the only threat to the survival of an adult moa, the world's largest eagle. Paying particular attention to the more interesting and unique forms known only or largely from the fossil record, Worthy and Holdaway describe the primary herbivores, the top predator, and other species. These are placed in the total fauna, where ducks, gruids, and even bats all followed an evolutionary path to flightlessness. Wonderful as these species were, most were ill-prepared to face new, mammalian predators - first rats brought by human visitors, then other mammals, and finally humans themselves. Copiously illustrated and carefully documented from the most current scientific research, *The Lost World of the Moa* reconstructs a fascinating evolutionary experiment that survived all manner of climatic and geological change, only to succumb to contact with the outside world.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Islands, especially the ones that haven't been in contact with the mainland for a very long time, come as close to being alternate histories as you can get in the real world. What would have happened if the primitive lemur relatives of monkeys and apes had become the dominant primates instead of monkeys and apes? Go to Madagascar and you can get a pretty good idea. What would happen if a fairly large island was populated almost exclusively by rats? Some of the Philippine islands still have the fading remnants of that experiment. This book talks about the results of a different experiment. What would happen if a fair-sized land mass lost all of its land mammals and most of its land creatures and had to be repopulated from the sea and the air? Go to New Zealand and you'll see the remnants of a once spectacular experiment in that direction. Moas were giant flightless birds of New Zealand. They were far heavier than ostriches. The largest ones weighed over four hundred pounds. They were herbivores, bird equivalents of deer, horses and bison. The last of the Moas probably died out shortly before Europeans started settling New Zealand. Like many island birds they appear to have been very vulnerable to human activities and quickly died out after the Polynesian Maori settled the islands. Moas weren't the only unique creatures of New Zealand, or even the most interesting. The island apparently broke loose from Gondwana, the southern super-continent of the Cretaceous around 82 million years ago. It probably carried a typical Cretaceous group of plants and animals, a few of which still survive there and nowhere else on earth.

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