





Jellyfish Trees: An Endangered Species



A jellyfish tree growing on the island of Mahé, Seychelles

Have you ever noticed that many sea creatures have a counterpart on land? There are sea lions and lions, zebrafish and zebras. Similarly, there is a remarkable plant named after the jellyfish. Why is it called a jellyfish tree? Read on.

Saving Endangered Species

One day, Dovid and his mother took a trip to the library. When they got there, his mother asked him if he wanted to choose a book to bring home.

Dovid's eyes grew round with excitement. He marched up and down the rows of shelves, searching for the most exciting story. Finally, he

settled on a bright orange book that had a picture of a funny-looking bird with tiny wings on the cover.

When they got home, his mother read him about the adventures of Donny the Dodo. This became Dovid's favorite book.

"Mommy," Dovid asked one day, "Can I get a dodo for a pet?"

"No," his mother answered, "Dodos became extinct many years ago."

"They are gone?" Dovid cried. "But they were such a special bird!"

For the rest of the day, Dovid couldn't help feeling sad when he remembered that there are no more dodos in the world. At bedtime, as his mother tucked him in, she asked him why he looked so unhappy.

Dovid's eyes welled up with tears. "I feel bad for the dodos. I wish they did not become extinct."

"You're right," his mother said, patting him on the head, "it is very sad. But now that we know that special plants and animals can become extinct, we can work on saving endangered species."

Dovid sat up in his bed. “When I grow up, I will do that. I will work on saving plants and animals.” With that thought in mind, he fell asleep with a smile on his face.

Seychelles: Home of the Jellyfish Tree

“On behalf of British Airways, we welcome you to Seychelles International Airport. The local time is 8:15 A.M. Temperature is 28 degrees Celsius. High humidity. We hope you enjoyed your trip and thank you for choosing to fly British Airways.”

Dovid hurried off the plane and through the airport, **jostling**¹ through crowds of tourists. “Dovid?” A man was calling his name. He turned around and stretched his hand out to the smiling stranger. “Linyon?”

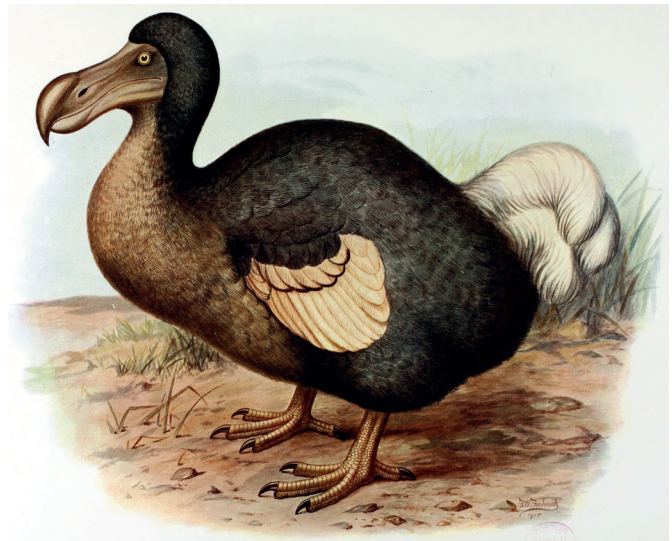
“That’s me! Welcome to Seychelles. Thank you for coming to help us preserve the **biodiversity**² of our beautiful country.” Dovid chuckled. “Thank you. This has been my dream since I was three years old.” Linyon took Dovid’s suitcase and loaded it into the waiting car.

“We are now on the island of Mahé, the largest in Seychelles,” Linyon explained as he backed out of the parking space. “The airport is just a few miles south of Victoria, which is the capital city of Seychelles.”

Dovid leaned back, taking in the magnificent scenery. “How many islands are there all together in Seychelles?” he asked.

“Seychelles is an **archipelago**³ made of 115 islands. Many are uninhabited. Seychelles is also home to many unique species. Have you been told what our assignment will be?”

“Yes,” Dovid replied excitedly. “We will be working with jellyfish trees to see what we can do to save them and their habitat.”



A drawing of the dodo that became extinct



The Seychelles International Airport

- 1 **jostling** – pushing through a crowd
- 2 **biodiversity** – the variety of living things in a particular place
- 3 **archipelago** – group of islands

"Ah, the Bwa Mediz," Linyon said. Seeing Dovid's confused look, Linyon clarified. "'Bwa Mediz' is how you say 'jellyfish tree' in Creole. That is the local language here. Don't worry, these islands were originally founded and populated by the French, which means we also speak French and English here. So, what do you know about the jellyfish tree?" Dovid pulled a paper out of his pocket.



The granite rock of Mahe, where the jellyfish tree lives

"The jellyfish tree is also called the Medusagyne oppositifolia," he read aloud. "The tree is **endemic**⁴ to Seychelles. It was thought to be extinct, until a tree was found in 1973. Now it is critically endangered." Linyon nodded as they pulled up to the hotel. "Now, go unpack and rest up. I will pick you up after lunch. Get ready for a good hike."

The Jellyfish Tree

Dovid was ready right on time. They left for the Morne Seychellois National Park. Once they reached the grounds, they set off down the Morne Blanc trail.



Jellyfish tree fruits

"Jellyfish trees are only found along four trails in this park," Linyon said, as they hiked up a path lined with **exotic**⁵ foliage. "Those trails are Bernica, Mont Serbert, Mont Copolia, and Mont Jasmin. There are less than 100 trees in all."

After 45 minutes of vigorous hiking, they made it to the top of the granite slopes that overlooked a shimmering beach. Dovid's jaw dropped at the incredible beauty. "Amazing, isn't it?" Linyon said, "but just wait until you see this." He pointed to a low bush. Dovid stepped closer. "Well, this is definitely a jellyfish tree! Look at those jellyfish fruits!"

The rough, dark gray bark was covered with long, shiny, waxy leaves. Between the leaves hung rustcolored fruits. They very much resembled the jellyfish that swim in the ocean.

- 4 **endemic** – growing exclusively there
- 5 **exotic** –remarkably unusual or different

"Yes," said Linyon, "the fruits start as white flower buds that grow into green fruits. As they mature, they turn rust in color. Do you see how this is splitting apart?" He pointed to one of the fruits. "Jellyfish tree fruits are **dehisc**⁶, so they open up, and the seeds get out. It is like opening a box of confetti outside—all the pieces fly away in the wind. And how they fly!

Jellyfish tree seeds are equipped with little wings that help them find new soil to take root in." Dovid plucked a red leaf off the ground and turned it over. "Why is it red?" he asked Linyon.

"The leaves turn red as they age."

"Cool," said Dovid. He studied the tree a bit longer. "It's interesting—looking at the characteristics of this tree, one would think that it grows in a very dry climate. Yet here we are overlooking the water in high humidity."

"That is part of the mystery. We have not yet been successful in planting jellyfish trees anywhere else. They also do not do well when left to grow in the wild, which contributes to their low numbers. The seeds also have a very short lifespan, so we do not have a lot of time to work with them."

"I have an idea," Dovid said, "let's collect as many seeds as we can and send them out to different botanical gardens around the world. We will describe the exact features and climate of jellyfish trees' natural habitat, and they will do their best to **replic**⁷ the conditions and tend to the new trees."

"Great thinking!" exclaimed Linyon, "and that is why we brought you here. Let's get to work!"



These are real jellyfish.



The flowers of the jellyfish tree.

6 **dehisc** – split

7 **replic** – copy



1. Circle the choice that has the same meaning as the following sentence from the lesson:

The seeds also have a very short lifespan.

- A. The seeds don't live long.
- B. The seeds are small in size.
- C. The seeds often die.
- D. The seeds aren't tall enough.

2. Circle the vocabulary word that best fits the sentence:

*The tablecloth was so (**exotic, replicate**) that I could not find another one that matched.*

3. Mark each statement as T (true) or F (false):

- ___ People can help prevent plants or animals from becoming extinct.
- ___ An archipelago has no body of water nearby.
- ___ Jellyfish trees can be found along four trails in Morne Seychellois National Park.
- ___ Jellyfish trees' fruits are split, allowing the seeds to spread outside after opening.

4. Which of the following sentences from the lesson supports the idea that jellyfish are very close to extinction?

- A. "Bwa Mediz" is how you say "jellyfish tree" in Creole, the local language here.
- B. There are less than 100 trees in all.
- C. Between the leaves hung rust-colored fruits that very much resembled the jellyfish that swim in the ocean.
- D. He turned around and stretched his hand out to the smiling stranger.





Questions

5. What is the author's purpose in including the story of Dovid and the dodo bird?
- A. The story directly continues the author's thoughts that are presented in the lesson's introduction.
 - B. The story alerts the reader to the fact that the next part of the story will require a lot of extra concentration.
 - C. The story introduces the concept of extinction and explains why Dovid wanted to save the jellyfish trees.
 - D. The story offers the reader the opportunity to learn about the dodo bird in depth.

6. How does the dialogue add to the lesson?

7. Is "jellyfish tree" a good nickname for this species? Why or why not?

8. What was the effect of Dovid learning that the jellyfish tree's fruit are dehiscent?

