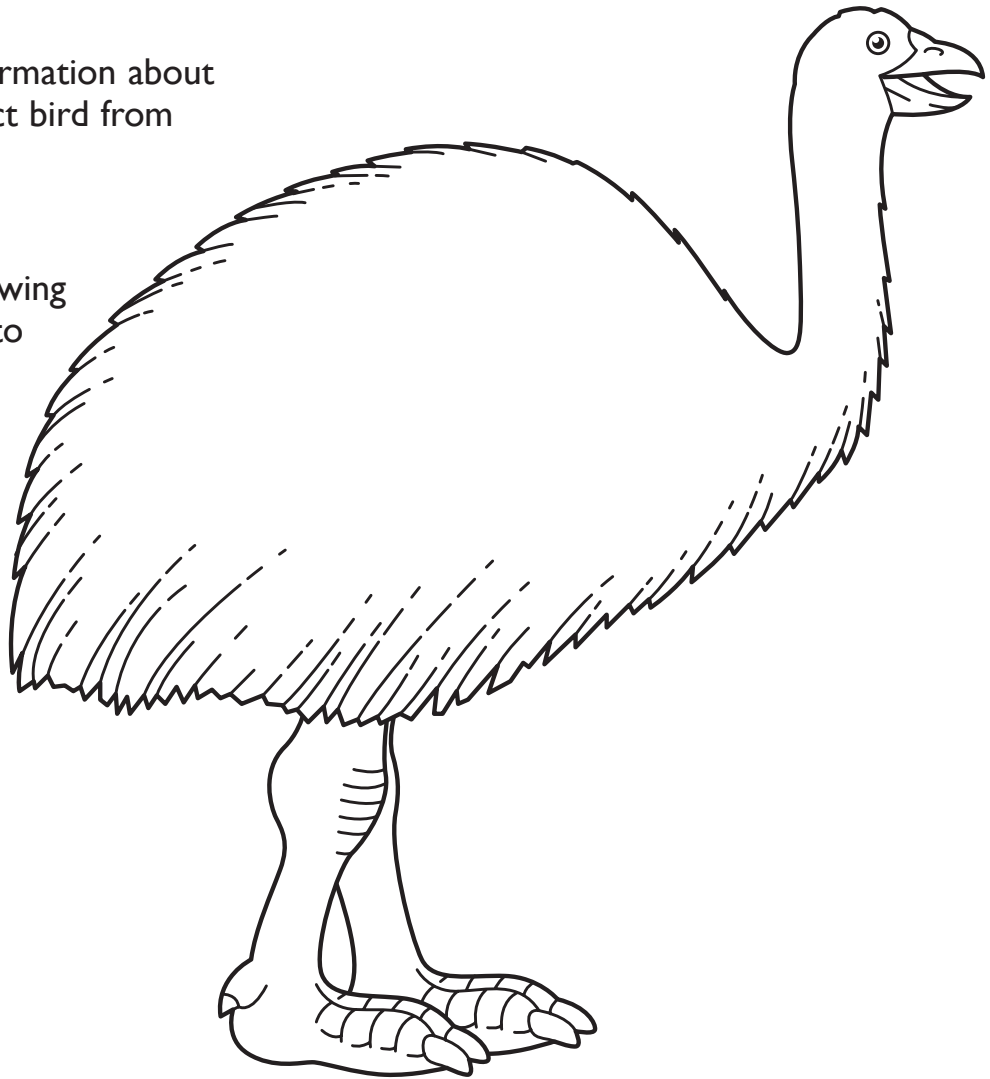


Why living things become extinct

Living things become extinct quickly when they cannot compete with others around them.

Here is some information about the Moa, an extinct bird from New Zealand.

Make up a poster (and include a drawing showing yourself to scale) to explain to others what the Moa was like and what happened to it.



Giant Moa

The Giant Moa (pronounced moor) was 3m tall and weighed 250kg. This made it one of the world's biggest birds ever. The Giant Moa lived in the forests of New Zealand. When the Maori people arrived in New Zealand in about 1150AD they found the Giant Moa good to eat, so they ate them to extinction. They did not try to farm them and make sure as many were reared as were eaten. When Captain Cook arrived in New Zealand in 1769 the Giant Moa had already been extinct for 150 years.

Answers

Varies with ingenuity of student.

Notes

There are, of course, two quite different causes of extinction. There are slow extinctions, due to natural changes in the climate or environment, or the way that one species can out-compete another. There are also rapid, natural mass extinctions such as the meteorite impact or whatever else caused the extinction of the dinosaurs. In the context of this book we are, however, talking about the way that extinction has been induced by human activities.

To get students to understand this, you might care to introduce the current argument over the conservation of fish stocks. Governments are saying that they must reduce catches or extinction may follow. On the other hand, fishermen are saying that reducing their catches will endanger their livelihoods. The two sides have a long and short term view respectively. Short term views are more liable to lead to extinction today just as they did in the past.

Not all extinctions are due to intentional slaughter, as the dodo shows, so students have to be aware that extinction can be caused by unthought through side effects as well as intentional effects.