



Golden Bats & Pink Pigeons

Gerald Durrell

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On this speck of volcanic soil in the middle of a vast sea, a complete, unique and peaceful world was created slowly and carefully. It waited there for hundreds of thousands of years for an annihilating invasion of voracious animals for which it was totally unprepared, a cohort of rapacious beasts led by the worst predator in the world, Homo sapiens . . . In an incredibly short space of time, a number of unique species had vanished . . . ' Mauritius, the green and mountainous island in the Indian Ocean, was once the home of the ill-fated dodo, and by the 1970s it still had many unique but endangered species, hanging onto their existence by their fingernails. When Gerald Durrell went to rescue some of these creatures from extinction, he experienced danger and discomfort, but enjoyed the adventures greatly. He spent nights in the jungle looking for bats and pink pigeons, and climbed near-vertical rock faces to find Telfair's skinks and Gunther's geckos, spending his spare time exploring the enchanted worlds of the coral reefs with their many species of multicoloured fish. By the end of his trip, he had an extraordinary collection of animals to take to his Jersey sanctuary from where the progeny could, in time, be restored to Mauritius.

Golden Bats & Pink Pigeons Details

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Author : Gerald Durrell

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Trounin says

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(c) Trounin

Clare O'Beara says

This is a fun read, as it details the explorations and adventures of Durrell while collecting birds, bats and reptiles on the island of Mauritius and a neighbour in the island chain called Round Island. However there is always gloom and desperation as we see that man's discovery of the islands has destroyed so many creatures and so much habitat.

Not alone do we get a detailed account of past ships' logs in which thousands of tortoises and turtles at a time were loaded - for food - but we see that when Durrell visited, some local fishermen were making a living from dynamiting coral reefs to sell fragments to tourists with cowrie and cone shells. Rabbits had been introduced which had eaten away everything that held the soil together so erosion was ruining Round Island, while introduced rats and monkeys were destroying pigeon nests on Mauritius.

The efforts made to catch threatened creatures in order to establish a separate breeding colony off the islands, was sadly necessary and the British establishment was seeing that it was done. The pink pigeons were reduced to fifty-five and golden fruit bats to about 120. The hardships endured by the little team included intense sun, monsoon type rain, bites, falls, jungle hikes, mosquitoes and amoebic dysentery, which I imagine was caused by being daft enough to finish a few sandwiches after giant snails and a rat had been feasting on them.

One item surprised me. The dodo tree is the nickname of the tambalocoque tree which is found only on Mauritius. The specimens found at this time were all old trees and no new trees were sprouting from the nuts. The naturalist based on the islands had the idea that the nuts were eaten by dodos, which could digest their hard shell, and the rest of the seed passed through the bird and germinated. This would explain why no seedlings had grown since the dodos were lost. Durrell amazingly said "It's a lovely story but I'm afraid it's

got more holes in it than a colander."

Not only is this an obvious cause and effect theory, but as a practical naturalist all his life he ought to have known better than to scoff at an ecological chain. I was waiting for the happier line at the end of the book, but there wasn't one. So it must have been after the publication in 1977, that naturalists had the idea of feeding the seeds to turkeys, which have a similar digestive system to dodos. The nuts germinated and there are now young - probably all stages of growth by this time - tambalacoque trees.

Priya says

Looking forward to reading many more books by this man.

Dlmrose says

3+

Randal White says

Daydreaming Of The Adventures I really enjoy Durrell's books. Both for the adventures and the education he provides. This one was short, a very quick read. Written later in his life, it concentrates a bit more on the conservation aspects than his earlier works. I have to wonder what it would have been like to have accompanied him on his adventures. Just the thought will provide me with many hours of daydreaming!

Nancy says

Golden Bats and Pink Pigeons: A Journey to the Flora and Fauna of a Unique Island is the entertaining story of Gerald Durrell's experience on Mauritius in the Indian Ocean where he collected rare specimens for his animal sanctuary. The Dodo had already vanished from the island and by the 1970s many more species were going the way of the Dodo.

Durrell's tales are entertaining and funny. His description of the Jak fruit as "an obscene green fruit, covered with knobs and looking rather like the corpse of a Martian baby" sent me into hysterics. My husband and I had just seen one at Kroger two days before. The Jak was meant to lure the Golden Bats and had a pungent smell "vaguely reminiscent of a putrefying body." And the produce man told us it was like "Juicy Fruit" gum! Glad we were not tempted.

After several delays, which involved the party's eating the bat fruit before it spoiled and buying more, the team finally landed on Rodriguez island. That evening the mosquitoes attacked. "I'm rather glad we came really, I would hate to think of all these mosquitoes going hungry," remarked one of the party. "Yes it's a form of conservation, really." Durrell replied.

The party must contend with other invasions as well, by giant land snails that invaded their tent and ate their food and baby Shearwaters that invade their bed.

The descriptions of Mauritius's flora, fauna, and coral reefs are vivid and gorgeous. My favorite was the chapter on the coral reefs, The Enchanted World. His writing is evocative and lovely as he describes experiencing the overwhelming life and color of the reef. You understand his enchantment.

As I read this chapter I experienced a tightness in the pit of my stomach, fearful that these teeming reefs are dying like reefs all over the world. I checked it out. The reef is suffering from higher temperature water due to El Nino events, and is also impacted by a billion tourists a year and the agricultural runoff from the island.

Mother Earth is losing her children from human impact and climate change. Durrell strove to save species from extinction. I am glad to have read his memoir and learned about his work.

I thank the publisher for the free ebook through NetGalley in exchange for a fair and unbiased review.

Read about Durrell's Zoo on Jersey
<https://www.durrell.org/wildlife/visit/>

Mauritan Wildlife Foundation to see the flora and fauna discussed in the book
<http://www.mauritan-wildlife.org/app...>

News report on the coral reef
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vrJUU...>

Sandie says

PBS viewers have been introduced to the Durrell family by the series on their time in Corfu. Gerald was the youngest child and his distinguishing characteristic was his love of animals, a love that was indulged by his mother in a way few children experience. This was a love that formed his life and work.

Golden Bats And Pink Pigeons is about Durrell's time on the island of Mauritius in the 1970's. It was the home of the dodo, the most famous example of extinction, and still at that time was home to many animals, reptiles and birds found nowhere else on earth. Durrell's focus as an adult was not just on exploring and finding such animals, but on his work as a biologist who ran a refuge in Jersey where endangered animals could be brought to breed in captivity until their numbers were such that they could be reintroduced to their native habitat. This work is ongoing after Durrell's death.

In this work, there are chapters devoted to the various animals he and his crew captured to rescue in their four months in the area. There is a chapter about the pink pigeons, one about various lizards and skinks they captured and another about bats. There is a luminous chapter about the coral reefs surrounding the island and all the never-before seen fish and other inhabitants of it. There is a chapter about the capture of boas. All of this work occurred in uncomfortable if not dangerous environments and Durrell's time there left him weakened and ill.

Readers will be enthralled with his adventures and his humorous method of making light of misfortunes and hard work. Durrell's delight in everything he saw and his passionate determination to rescue species on the verge of extinction shines through on every page. This book is recommended for readers of nonfiction who enjoy travel books and those interested in the environment.

Ash says

quite funny.. enjoyed it so far!

Amrita Tripathy says

awww..as always durrell types writing

Allison says

I really enjoyed this book which is the account of trips Gerald Durrell made in the 1970's to collect endangered species of Mauritius and some nearby islands to begin a captive breeding and preservation program at his zoo in Jersey. They style is typical Durrell with plenty of laughs and descriptions of the islands such that I want to pack my bags now. My only regret is that the book is relatively short at under 200 pages. However, my edition (British 2008) does have brief updates on the current status of the animals which was a really nice addition. Sadly, the book seems to be somewhat out of print in the US except for the Kindle edition, but there seems to have been a full reprinting of many of Durrell's books in the UK recently.

Jennybeast says

One of my favorite parts of reading Gerald Durrell is looking up all the species he mentions to see how endangered they currently are. The exciting bit is that most of them are still around (for now), thanks to the work Durrell and the Jersey Zoo have done on their behalf. It's only a small drop of optimism, but it's still a heady one. I really enjoyed this particular adventure.

Hilary says

As this is one of Durrell's later books, written after his Jersey conservation zoo was established, you can see the difference in tone. The earliest books tend to be light-hearted, descriptively humorous and (one suspects) slightly exaggerated for comedic effect, while the later books still maintain the wonderful descriptions of people and animals but with much more serious undertones and the emphasis on educating - rather than entertaining - the reader, as evidenced by the subtitle: A Journey to the Flora and Fauna of a Unique Island. You're still presented with poetic descriptions that capture all your senses, strange characters of all nationalities acting as local guides, and that dry wit, but it also includes some historic narrative from previous explorers and some warnings about animal endangerment and the importance of maintaining their environments.

In the 1970s, Durrell travelled to Mauritius (multiple times) with his assistant and secretary to collect sufficient individuals from colonies of several endangered species unique to the islands, to start (or maintain)

captive breeding programs. Some of them were down to just a handful of individuals, and amongst them were golden fruit bats, pink pigeons, boas, several types of skink, and guntheri geckos. I've never had such a desire to go snorkelling as after reading his chapter on the various reefs in the area... I wonder if those magnificent and so varied places are still there.

Naturally there were some problems with the landscape (the Olympic slide), capturing/feeding the animals (the local equivalent of durian), the local climate and even transportation (how *do* you prioritize essential clothing, fruit and boxes when the plane can't carry everything?) but somehow creative solutions were discovered.

Spoiler: There's a postscript with good news about the Pink Pigeon breeding program.

I should also note that the family photographs, while wonderful, are the same ones as in the new edition of *Three Singles to Adventure*, so if you're reading both, don't get your hopes up!

Disclaimer: I received a free copy from NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.

Bill says

There is something so delicious and fascinating about reading Gerald Durrell's books – they are full of humor and I relish that and they also take you to places that, frankly, I'll never go, finding it pleasing where I am here on the coast of Maine.

In *GOLDEN BATS AND PINK PIGEONS*, Gerald Durrell takes us to Mauritius – don't know where that is? Visualize the map of Africa that one of your teachers might have pulled down in front of one of your long ago classrooms. See that island off the right hand side? That's Madagascar – and Mauritius is off to the right of that.

And it seems as if it might be a tropical paradise! Not so Round Island that he also visits that is off Mauritius, an eroded volcanic cone that presents all kinds of problems trying to catch various reptiles along with a good bit of comedy, for Durrell knows how to laugh at himself and is adept at it.

Of course you also meet weird and strange creatures you may have never known existed – so Join Durrell and his friends as he sets off on yet another fascinating adventure to capture creatures to breed at his breeding zoo before they disappear from our Earth.
