

Level 4 Non-fiction – Return of the Moa

IMAGINE THIS: You're walking through the bush, native birds all around. It's very peaceful, but then you hear crashing footsteps. Another tramper? No, whatever's making that noise ... it's huge. The footsteps get closer, and something totally unexpected steps onto the track. The creature is taller than any person, despite its short stubby legs. A comically small head sits at the end of a very long neck. You see feathers but no wings, although it's clearly a bird – and another native one at that. It's the moa, New Zealand's legendary giant, back from the dead!

No one has seen a live moa for more than five hundred years. We can be sure there are none left, even in the most *remote* parts of the country. But recent scientific breakthroughs have created a startling possibility – bringing the moa back from the dead! It sounds like science fiction, but de-extinction is closer to reality than you might think.

In 2013, a historic meeting took place in Washington, DC. For the first time, world experts in fields such as **genetics**, animal biology, and **bioethics** met to talk about de-extinction. They reached an amazing conclusion: de-extinction is now within reach. "It's gone very much further, very much more rapidly, than anyone would've imagined," says Ross MacPhee, a mammal expert from the Museum of Natural History in New York. Professor Philip Seddon, a zoologist at Otago University, agrees: "The technology is real, and it's coming." What's really interesting for New Zealanders is that our very own moa is near the top of the de-extinction list.