

A Case Study in Interactive Storytelling:

Bring Back The Dodo

by Robin Goodwin

Background

Brief

Bring a short story to life, while considering the flow of content, visual design, expressive web typography, animated and interactive enhancements, and overall responsive nature. You will be designing and developing a more experiential single-page website of around 700 words. It is critical that you experiment with the format to create a unique viewing experience, while still considering the flow of information and usability.

1. Tell the history of a person, place, or thing.
2. Tell a story about a collection of objects.
3. Choose an existing article or chapter.
4. Choose a topic of interest, then inform, persuade, or entertain.
5. Demonstrate a “How to” process.

Story

I selected an article from [*Scientific American: “A De-extinction’ Company Wants to Bring Back the Dodo.”*](#) It briefly discusses the extinction of the bird, the process and difficulty of bringing it back, and the ethical implications of ‘de-extinction.’

Strategy

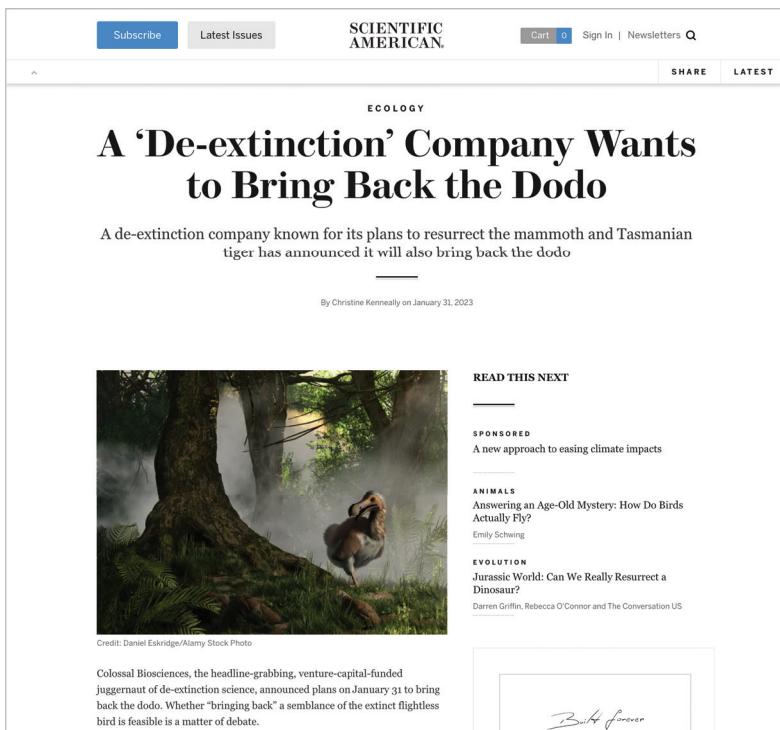
The current design is clean and easy to understand, but it lacks excitement and novelty. The addition of more imagery, a little motion, and some quotation call-outs could go a long way to boost engagement and aid in storytelling. Additionally, I think it would be valuable to use design to appeal to a broader audience.

Research

Content

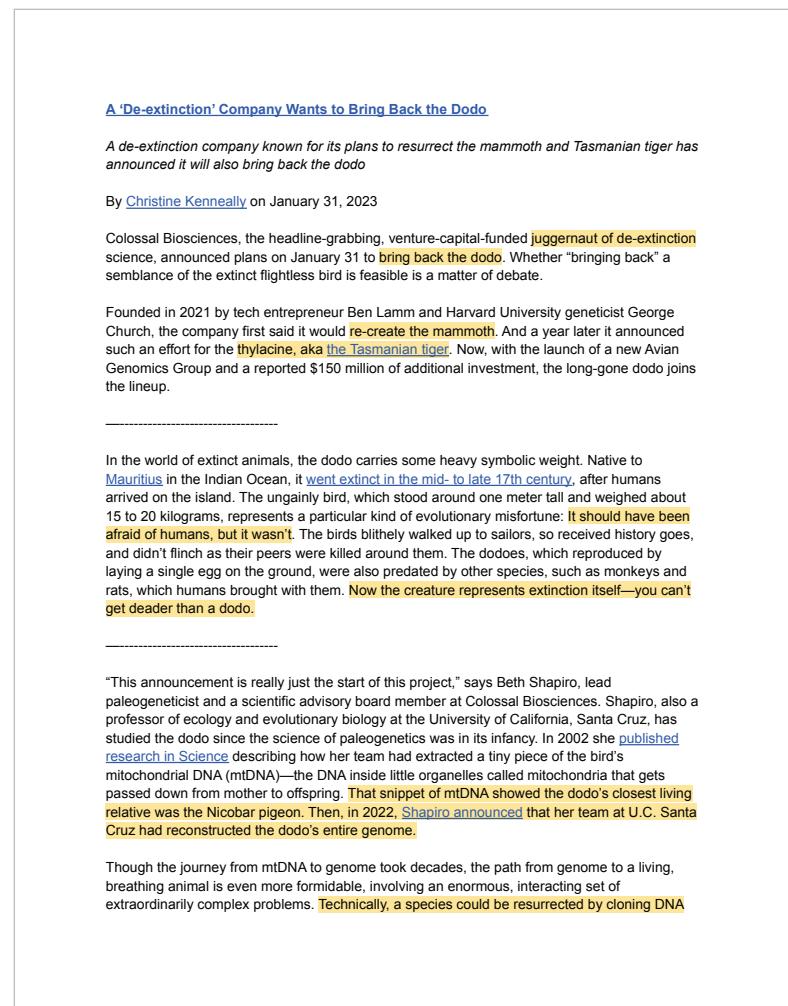
I read through the article, highlighting evocative words and phrases and adding breaks between paragraphs where there was opportunity to add graphics. It's important to note that, while the content is educational, there is an underlying tone of lightheartedness. I'd like to convey this tone with the design and graphics of the site.

Original Appearance:



The screenshot shows a news article on the Scientific American website. The header includes 'Subscribe', 'Latest Issues', 'Cart 0', 'Sign In', 'Newsletters', and a search bar. The main title is 'A 'De-extinction' Company Wants to Bring Back the Dodo' under the 'ECOLOGY' category. Below the title is a sub-headline: 'A de-extinction company known for its plans to resurrect the mammoth and Tasmanian tiger has announced it will also bring back the dodo'. The author is 'Christine Kenneally' and the date is 'January 31, 2023'. The article features a large image of a dodo bird in a forest setting. A 'READ THIS NEXT' section follows, with a sponsored article on climate impacts and other articles on animals and evolution. A note at the bottom credits Daniel Eskridge/Alamy Stock Photo and discusses the feasibility of resurrecting the dodo.

Annotated article:



The annotated version of the article includes several highlighted sections of text. The first highlighted section is the sub-headline: 'A de-extinction company known for its plans to resurrect the mammoth and Tasmanian tiger has announced it will also bring back the dodo'. The second highlighted section is a quote from the author: 'Founded in 2021 by tech entrepreneur Ben Lamm and Harvard University geneticist George Church, the company first said it would re-create the mammoth. And a year later it announced such an effort for the thylacine, aka the Tasmanian tiger. Now, with the launch of a new Avian Genomics Group and a reported \$150 million of additional investment, the long-gone dodo joins the lineup.' The third highlighted section is a paragraph about the dodo's symbolic weight: 'In the world of extinct animals, the dodo carries some heavy symbolic weight. Native to Mauritius in the Indian Ocean, it went extinct in the mid- to late 17th century, after humans arrived on the island. The ungainly bird, which stood around one meter tall and weighed about 15 to 20 kilograms, represents a particular kind of evolutionary misfortune: It should have been afraid of humans, but it wasn't. The birds blithely walked up to sailors, so received history goes, and didn't flinch as their peers were killed around them. The dodos, which reproduced by laying a single egg on the ground, were also predated by other species, such as monkeys and rats, which humans brought with them. Now the creature represents extinction itself—you can't get deader than a dodo.' The fourth highlighted section is a quote from Beth Shapiro: '"This announcement is really just the start of this project," says Beth Shapiro, lead paleogeneticist and a scientific advisory board member at Colossal Biosciences. Shapiro, also a professor of ecology and evolutionary biology at the University of California, Santa Cruz, has studied the dodo since the science of paleogenetics was in its infancy. In 2002 she published research in *Science* describing how her team had extracted a tiny piece of the bird's mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA)—the DNA inside little organelles called mitochondria that gets passed down from mother to offspring. That snippet of mtDNA showed the dodo's closest living relative was the Nicobar pigeon. Then, in 2022, Shapiro announced that her team at U.C. Santa Cruz had reconstructed the dodo's entire genome.' The fifth highlighted section is a concluding statement: 'Though the journey from mtDNA to genome took decades, the path from genome to a living, breathing animal is even more formidable, involving an enormous, interacting set of extraordinarily complex problems. Technically, a species could be resurrected by cloning DNA'.

Research

According to *Scientific American*, they have, “A worldwide audience of over 9 million comprised of forward thinking, solution-seeking readers who cement trends and set agendas that others follow - they are the Minds That Matter.”

The audience is educated, mostly adults, probably somewhat affluent, and relatively tech-savvy (there are many digital subscribers).

Despite having a technologically adept audience full of progressive thinkers, the design of the publication and website has remained fairly classic and understated. I think there is room to engage with the current audience further by adding interactive elements, and to potentially grab new readers who are younger and seeking materials that are closer to “edu-tainment.”

Reference: <https://www.scientificamerican.com/mediakit/>

Audience



Media examples

Research

Richard McKinney

Developer at a medical technology start-up



User Persona

Demographics

Richard is a 30M, and he has been married to Mary, a programmer, for 3 years. He has a degree in CS, and lives in Boston, MA. He and his wife don't have any children, as they both are very dedicated to their work.

Goals

Richard likes to stay up-to-date on scientific breakthroughs and news, but he prefers publications that are written for a general audience since it's easier to read before bed, and formal research tends to be pretty dull, in his opinion. He also has quite varied interests when it comes to science, so he appreciates a broader range of topics in his literature.

Behaviors and Habits

Richard is incredibly busy with his work at the start-up. His days start early and end late. He really looks forward to his wind-down time in the evening with his wife. They usually sit together and watch *John Oliver*, followed by about an hour of reading. They like to share interesting factoids with each other. On weekends, they like to go to the art museum or bike around town.

Technical Skills

As a developer Richard is very tech savvy. He often reads on a digital device, and he can be very judgy about new tech. He always buys the latest gadgets, and loves to write overly thorough online reviews for them.

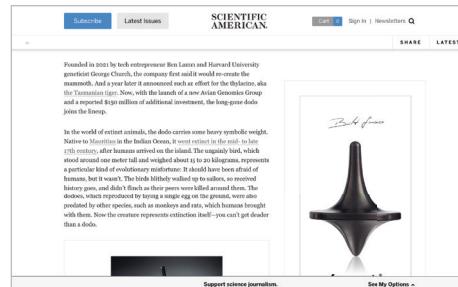
Environment

During the week, Richard is at the office most of his day. When he finally gets home, it can be difficult for him to focus on intellectually taxing or overly dry information since he's so exhausted. His home environment is very cozy and quiet, though, so he views it as his sanctuary. Despite spending so much time on a computer during the workday, he still loves his devices at home.

Relationships

Mary has very similar interests to Richard, and they are generally very supportive of one another in all aspects of their lives. Richard's brother doesn't really understand his "obsession" with technology, but he still tries to connect with Richard by sending him interesting articles when he finds them.

Research



Competition

I looked at a variety of interactive websites from other educational institutions. The text is always legible, and it's split up into bite-sized sections so as not to overwhelm the viewer. While many of these sites rely of photography for graphics, that approach wouldn't work for me since there are no photographs of dodos, and I really wanted to showcase the bird. I did come across a few sites that used historical imagery (maps, etchings, etc.) or contemporary illustrations, and I often found them to be more compelling. In particular, I loved the animated elements on [this site](#), and the use of background graphics to add texture, interest, and variety on [this website](#).

I also found that the sites with illustrations felt more accessible than the sites that were relying on photography. The photographed images tended to feel more cold and serious, and they lacked the element of storytelling that I was looking for.

For all these reasons, I opted to stick with editorial-inspired type (keep the content legible and bite-sized), but broken up with some colorful animations that will aid in rhythm and storytelling.

Research

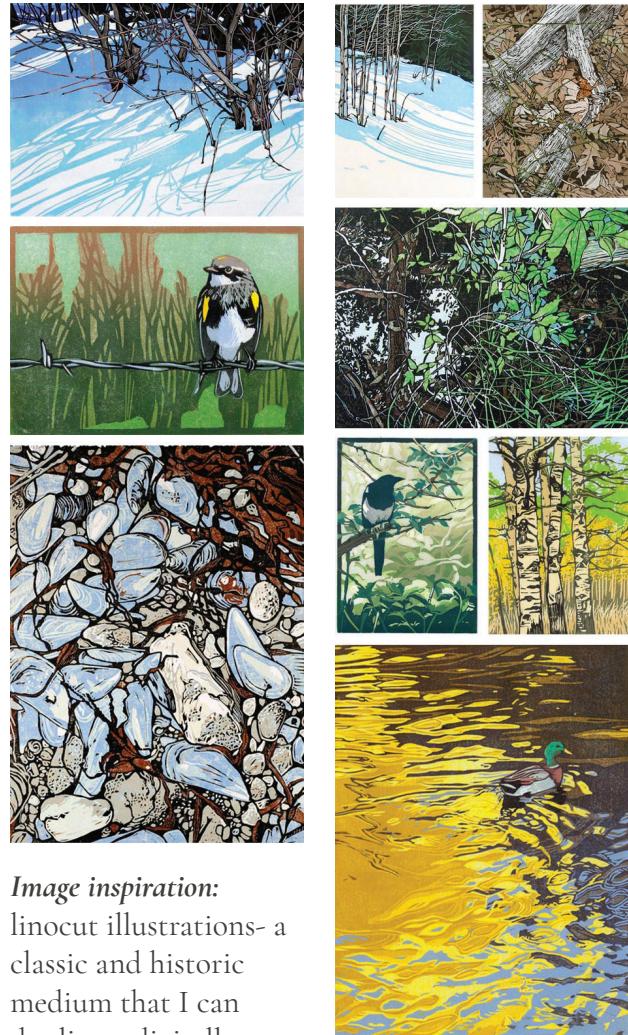


Image inspiration:
linocut illustrations- a
classic and historic
medium that I can
duplicate digitally.

Moodboard



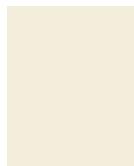
Colors: Saturated, yet inspired by nature.

Type: A combination of bold/modern and historic



Work Sans Black

Cormorant Garamond



Headline

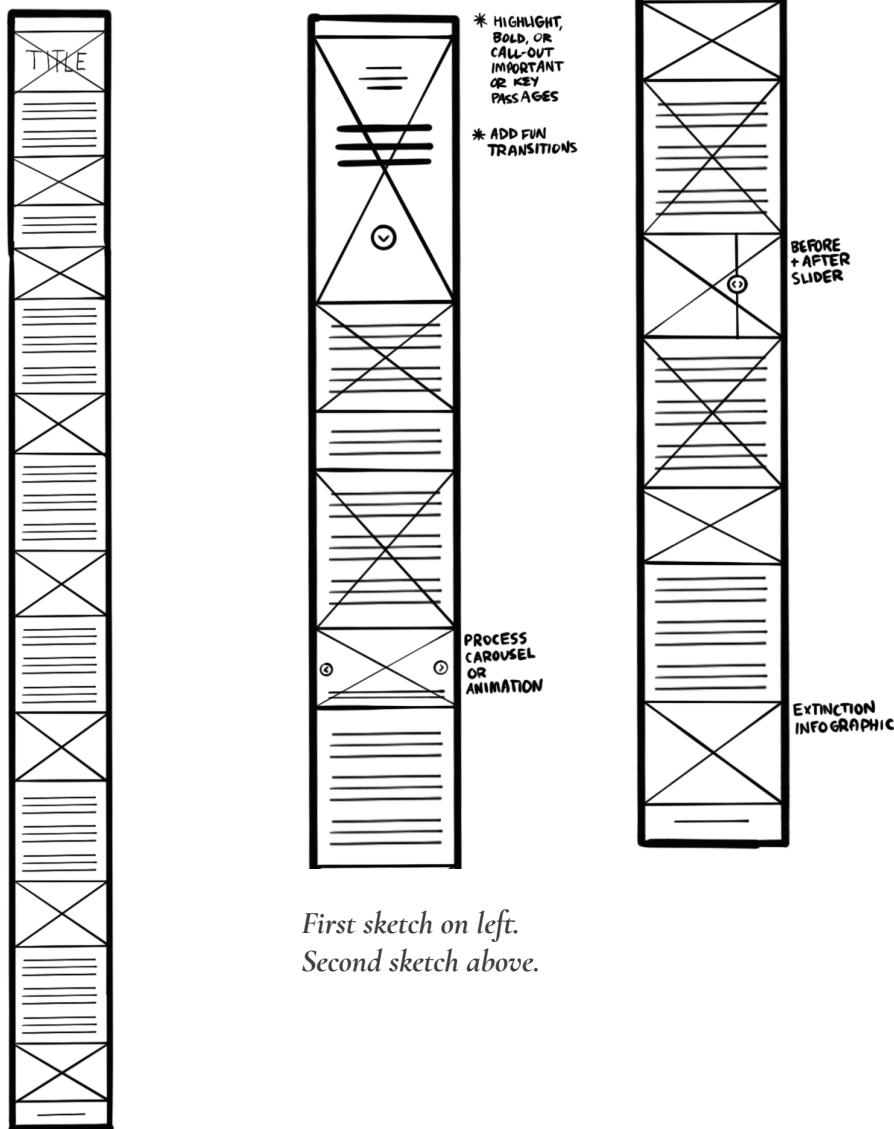
Subheading



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Concept Evolution

Sketches



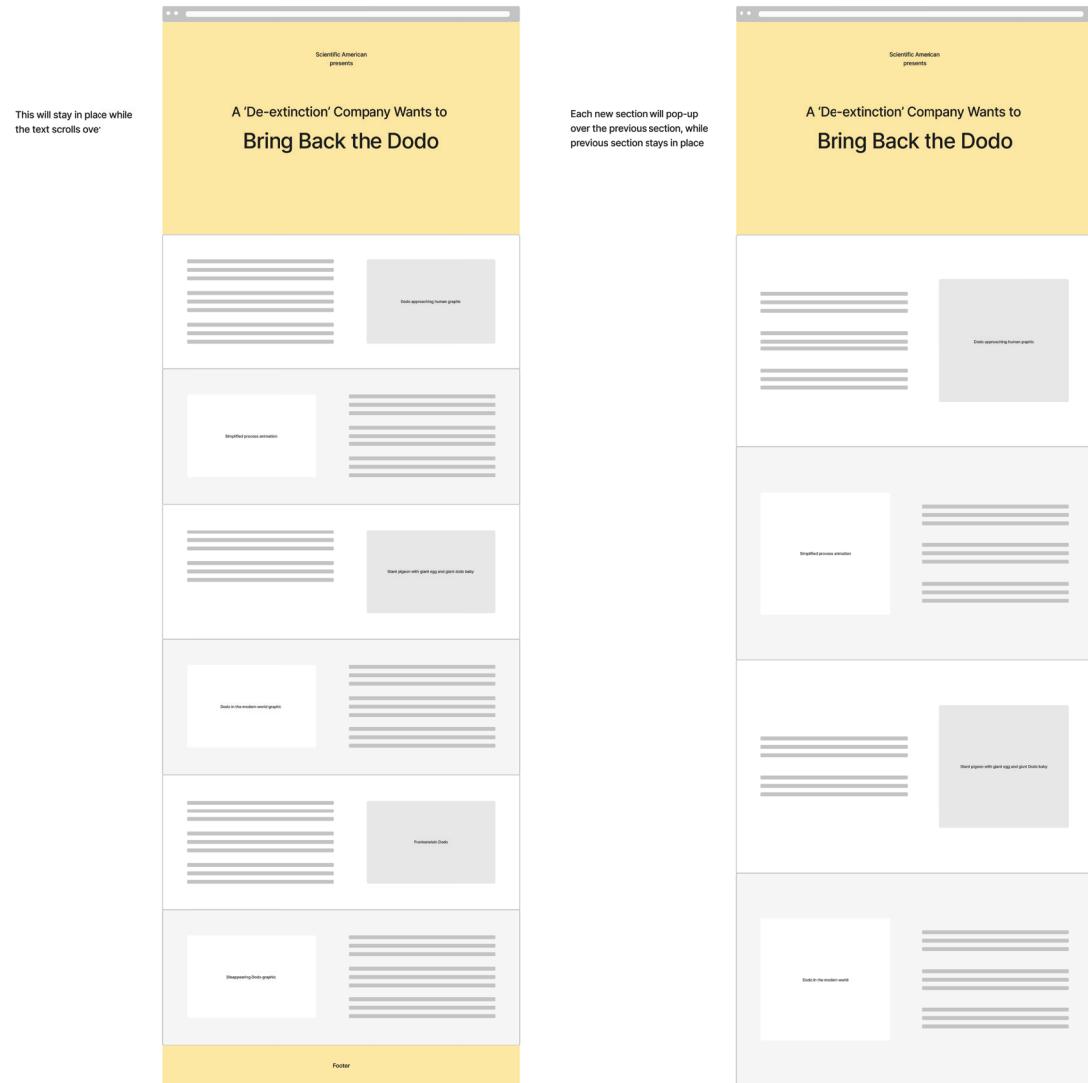
*First sketch on left.
Second sketch above.*

My first set of sketches was very simple. I used mobile proportions, and stuck with a basic image, text, image, text layout. While it seemed perfectly fine, it also felt entirely too boring. So, I made a second set of sketches where I included more text over images and a variety of different interactive elements (image carousels, interactive slider animations, etc.).

After using Skeleton and having some class discussions, I decided my design needed to fall somewhere between the two: something with rhythm, hierarchy, and novelty, but also executable with my skill set.

Concept Evolution

Wireframes



When I transitioned to wireframing, I had a clearer idea of how to create some rhythm and variety in the design without going beyond my abilities. I decided I would utilize Skeleton's strengths (grid with rows and columns), but alternate the text, image, and background colors.

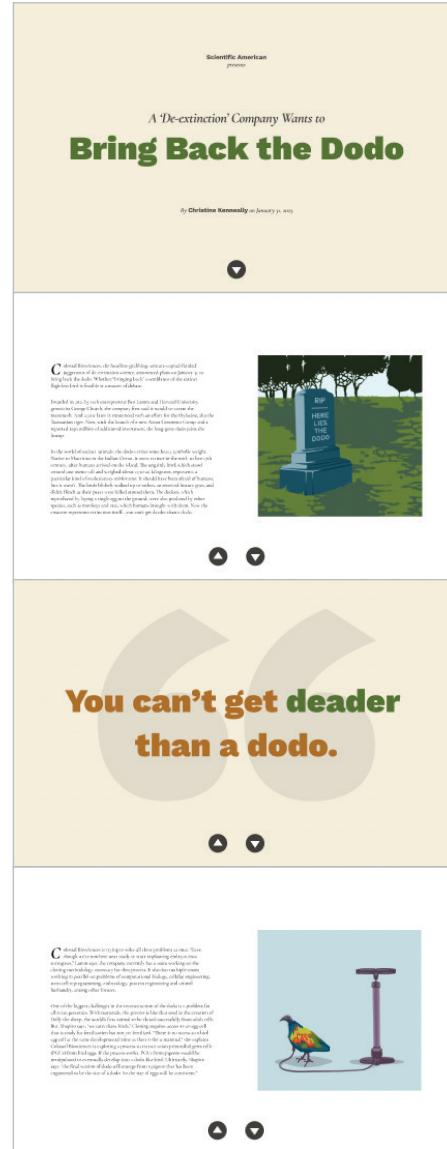
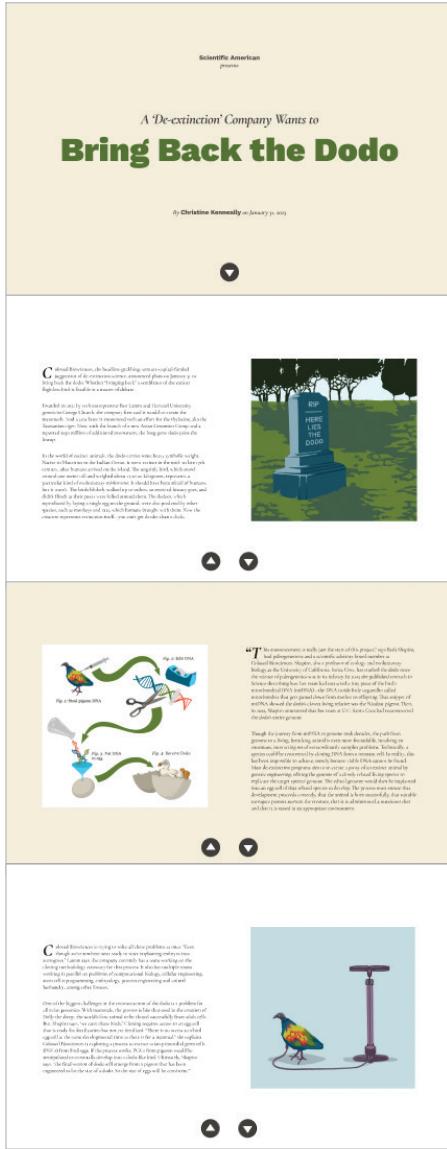
From there, I was still hoping for a little more interaction, so I thought it would be fun to try creating containers that the user could navigate to via buttons (so it would almost feel like flipping through a set of cards).

I received positive feedback from users at this point, so I decided to move forward with this layout.

*First wireframe on left.
Second wireframe on right.*

Concept Evolution

Prototype



My first iteration of the prototype tested well, but some users said the body copy over the beige was a little tricky to read, and a few other users expressed that there could be a little more variety in the layout.

In order to maintain legibility, I opted to have all the body copy over white backgrounds. To add a little more variety, I decided to add some large call-out quotes in between the body copy so I could push the hierarchy further and still use the idea of alternating backgrounds.

First prototype on left.
Second prototype on right.

Outcome

Website

Scientific American
presents

A De-Extinction Company Wants to Bring Back the Dodo

by Christine Kenneally
on January 31, 2023

You can't get deader than a dodo.

Most de-extinction programs aim to re-create a proxy of an extinct animal by genetic engineering.

The final version of the

When I finally got to the point where I needed to start coding, I was glad that I'd opted to maximize the utility of Skeleton. Even still, it was incredibly difficult to get the site to its current state. I've discovered that I'm terrible at de-bugging code, and it's best left to the professionals.

I tried to set the height of each wrapper to 100vh to replicate the card-like experience I was going for, but I ran into a lot of problems with overflow that I couldn't solve. In the future, I'd like to fix this, plus I'd like to really refine the animations a bit more.

Overall, I'm relatively happy with the outcome, and I even included a small amount of JavaScript in order to get the final animation to play when the viewer reaches that viewport (rather than have the animation be on a permanent loop).

Coded website on left.