



Animal Dining Adaptations

Amy investigates...

Feeding Wildlife: Right or Wrong?

Eco Kids Debate

When Eating Gets Weird

Strangest diets revealed!

EXTREME EATERS

NATURE'S FABULOUS FOODIES



CHARLIE MEETS A PYGMY SHREW



Issue 114
April 2024

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Hello, Eco Kids,

greetings from the
wilds of Alaska – the
breathtaking Katmai
National Park!



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As a proud grizzly bear, I hail from the majestic mountains and sprawling forests of Alaska, where the air is crisp and the rivers run wild. This, my friends, is bearvana!

Now, let's talk about food – the highlight of any self-respecting grizzly's day! We grizzlies are true omnivores, which means we eat just about anything we can get our paws on. Did you know that 75% of the food we eat is plant-based?

That's right! Fruits, roots, grasses and nuts – we gorge on nature's green bounty.

We have appetites as big as our bellies, and we're always on the lookout for a

tasty snack. One of my favourite meals is catching fresh, wriggling salmon, battling upstream on their epic journey. There's nothing quite like the thrill of the catch and the satisfaction of a belly full of fresh fish!

But what makes us grizzlies such expert eaters, you ask? Well, we've got some pretty handy adaptations to help us out. For starters, our sharp claws and powerful jaws make it easy for us to catch and devour our prey. Plus, our keen sense of smell allows us to sniff out food from miles away. No tasty treat – like a ground squirrel or a shrew – can escape our noses!

So, my dear Eco Kids, if you ever find yourself in Katmai National Park, be sure to give me a roar – I'll be the one enjoying a scrumptious salmon feast by the river!

Yours in wildness,

Guss the Grizzly Bear



From enormous appetites to choosy chompers, feast your eyes on...

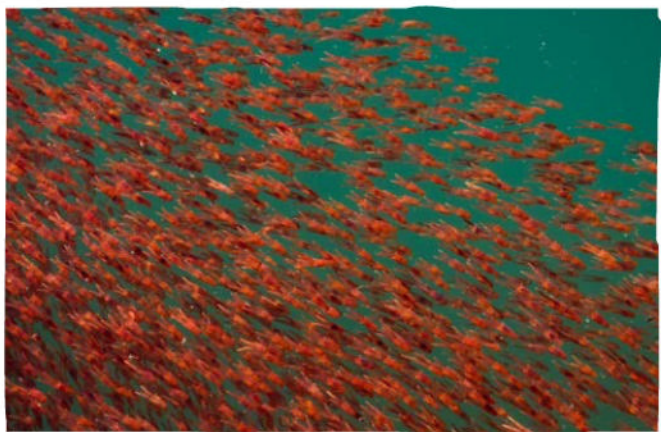


NATURE'S FABULOUS FOODIES!

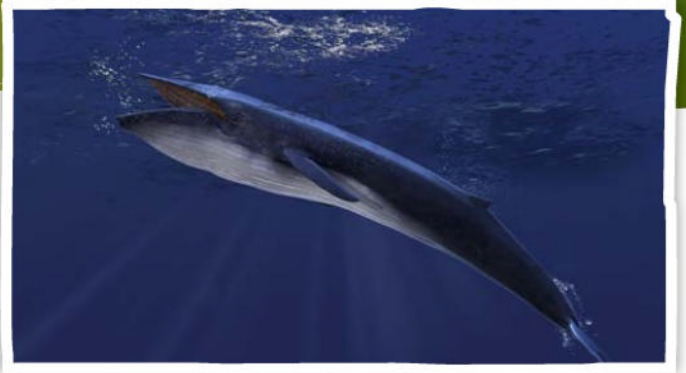
By JD Savage

Animals love their food, don't they? When they're not munching, they're often out on meal-finding missions. Few ever shrug off a snack. Some even go on feasting frenzies!

Biggest bingers



Imagine you're a **krill**, a tiny, shrimp-like creature. One moment, you're bobbing on the ocean with about ten thousand of your closest friends. Your super-swarm is so vast that it's visible from space. A gang that size should be safe from *any* sea predator, right? Wrong! Hold on to your shell – a **blue whale** is diving your way. It's about to lunge through the lot of you with its mouth open. **GULP!**



No other animal can eat so much in one go – and your swarm was only for starters. A single blue whale may eat up to **3.6 million krill** per day!

But don't judge appetite by size alone. Take **hummingbirds**, for instance. Despite their tiny size, they also have epic eating habits.

Has an adult ever told *you* not to eat so fast? Nobody gave hummingbirds that advice. They eat sweet flower nectar at up to 13 tongue-darting licks per second! They may even flit around a few thousand flowers each day to slurp up as much of the sweet stuff as possible.

Other animal-feeding frenzies are destructive. Enter the **locust** swarm: a buzzing horde of up to billions of huge insects. Because they fly in such large groups, they can eat enough crops to feed over three million humans in one day!



Fun Fact

Hummingbirds' hearts can beat over 1,200 times per minute when they're active. Beat *that*!

But why do so many other wild creatures seem to have ever-rumbly tummies?



So, are animals just greedy?

Well, blue whales are Earth's largest animals. These massive mammals must gulp down hefty helpings to keep going.

But hold on half a tick! Why do such colossal creatures feed on such tiny treats? No wonder they can't stop. Why aren't they gobbling up big sharks and octopuses, instead?

Good question! It's because their mouths sport rows of baleen. That's a filter-like material with food-trapping bristles. It lets water flow out while holding in only **tiny** prey.



Humpback whales are baleen whales, too!

As for fast-flapping hummingbirds, they burn through energy faster than you can say "nectar-nosher". They need to keep feeding for fuel, too.

Well, imagine feeling peckish but finding no food at home. Not even a corner of a crumb! You head out with your family to help stock up. Yet you find every supermarket and food shop locked up and empty, with signs reading:

! CLOSED !

BACK SOON - MAYBE.

IF YOU'RE LUCKY. BUT WE MIGHT NEVER OPEN AGAIN.

SOZ!

If that's all you found for miles around, *you'd* be quick to pounce on any food you could find, wouldn't you?

In nature, many animals feel just as uncertain about when their next meal may be. They eat when they can, not knowing when the next nibble may come their way.



So, **tigers** and **lions** gorge on lots of meat in a single sitting because their next kill may not come around for another week or more.

Great grazers

Elephants are big eaters, too, grazing, gobbling and guzzling for around 16-18 hours per day. Like many large, powerful animals, they're plant-eaters.



Digestive systems are those tummy organs that transform food and drink into substances the body can use. Well, elephants poo out at least half of what they eat *undigested*. But that waste doesn't go to waste – **beetles**, **flies** and other **poo-eating insects** make the most of it! Then, mammals come sniffing around to make a meal of *them*.



Animals whose guts don't break down all their food have to keep eating, too. We're looking at *you*, elephants!

QUICK QUIZ

Sloths seem super-slow at most things. So, do they eat a lot – or barely bother?

Guess, then check your answer below!



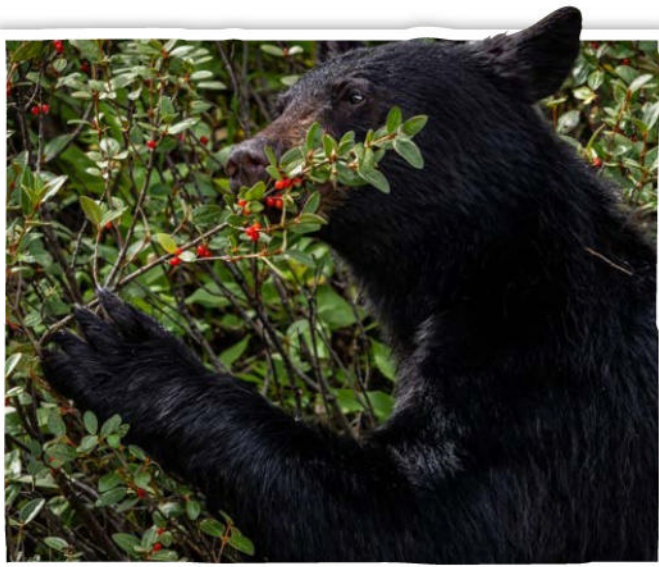
Some animals even gulp down prey that's bigger than *themselves*! **Burmese pythons** are known for devouring small **deer**, other mammals and even **alligators**. In 2005, one 3.9-metre-long snake tried to eat a huge 'gator in the Everglades in Florida, USA – and exploded!

Fun fact

Burmese pythons' organs can grow as much as double their size after they eat a huge meal. They return to normal just over a week after digesting it!

Quick Quiz

Sloths eat very little as they take so long to digest food. Even their guts work in slow motion!



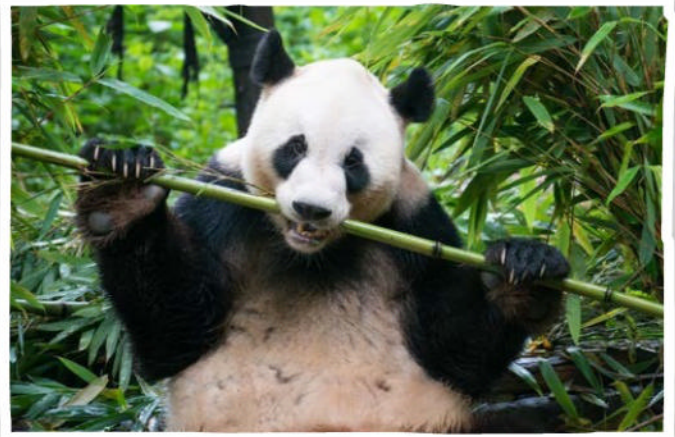
Many mammals pack in the grub before winter comes around. They're stocking up on food and energy for the cold season, when they hide away to hibernate or slip into seriously slow-mo mode.



Other creatures migrate, embarking on epic journeys. **Birds** and **butterflies** fuel up on food before long flights that can span thousands of kilometres. It provides the energy they need for their travels.

So, when animals indulge in hearty meals, it's perfectly practical. Yet some are surprisingly *picky* eaters...

Giant pandas mostly stick to a bamboo diet, eating those tall, woody stalks and little else for up to 16 hours a day. Over two million years ago, they regularly ate meat, and still have the inner body parts



of a meat-eater. That makes it hard for them to digest bamboo's toughest parts. Result? About 40 bamboo poos a day!

Fun Fact

Bamboo is protein-packed, so maybe it's not *too* different from a meat diet for pandas.

Can you guess what this large African vulture likes to eat? Vultures usually feed on carrion – decaying animal flesh!



Not this one. It's a **palm-nut vulture**, and most of the time it's vegetarian!

Of course, other animals are anything *but* picky. **Pigs**, for example, taste-test almost anything they come across. And, in a recent Wildlife News, Rhona revealed that pet **cats** have been seen eating **over 2,000 animal species**, from **turtles** to **insects**, when out and about.

From the finicky to the fearless, animals across the globe have a remarkable range of eating habits!

A Pygmy Shrew!



By JD Savage



It's me, Charlie, the Eco Kid who can chat with animals. This time I'm meeting a tiny mammal who truly lives life in the fast lane!

Charlie: I'm looking for the UK's tiniest land mammal. They're spread widely worldwide, with millions of them here in the UK alone. It shouldn't be too hard to find one!

I'm exploring woodland with lots of dense grass because I hear they like making tunnels through it. Wait, what was that? I'm sure I just saw a furry little creature scurrying through those stalks.

Pygmy Shrew: Nom, nom, nom.

Charlie: Yes, there you are. Sorry to interrupt your eating.

Pygmy Shrew: It's hard not to. I'm *always* chomping away. Nom, nom.

Charlie: I'm sure you're a **pygmy shrew**. You have a different tail from a common shrew.

Pygmy Shrew: A common shrew – where? No other shrew had better come near here, or there'll be a fight!

Charlie: You look too tiny and cute to be a brawler.

Pygmy Shrew: You should hear our high squeaks when we protect our territory! I carve out my trenches through this grass, and then I defend them. Pardon me, I feel peckish. Nom, nom, nom.

Charlie: You're munching again. So, what do you eat?

Pygmy Shrew: Spiders, woodlice...

Charlie: Earthworms?

Pygmy Shrew: Bleugh! No. Don't be disgusting!

Charlie: Sorry, but common shrews eat them.

Pygmy Shrew: Common shrews? I'll fight *any* shrews if they come for my food! And speaking of food, my lunch break just started. Time to feast!

Charlie: You're finding lots of insects to eat in there. But you must stop eating at some point – if only to sleep.

Pygmy Shrew: Who has time to sleep when there's so much delicious stuff to munch on?

Charlie: Yes, like, er, spiders. But you must sleep *sometimes*.

Pygmy Shrew: Only for about 15 minutes, and then I eat for another 15 minutes.

Charlie: Is that what you do all day, too?

Pygmy Shrew: Yes, eat and sleep, eat and sleep. I eat more than my body weight every day. I feel something terrible will happen if I stop for a few hours.

Charlie: Yes, I think you need to keep eating to survive.

Pygmy Shrew: Speaking of eating, I feel like a bite right now. Nom, nom, nom.

Charlie: I just need to work out *why* you must eat so much.

Pygmy Shrew: Eat, you say? I am quite hungry. Time to grab a snack. This spider will do. Nom nom nom.



When you see that nose, you know it's a shrew, not a mouse!

Charlie: I get it. You're always on the move, foraging for food...

Pygmy Shrew: And dodging pesky predators, like owls and other birds!

Charlie: So, you must burn up lots of energy – and smaller animals lose body heat quicker than bigger ones. I bet you must keep eating for energy just to keep going and stay warm.

Pygmy Shrew: Did you say eat? Good idea. I bet there are lots of woodlice in that rotting wood. Yes, there are – nom, nom, nom.

Charlie: There seems to be enough food to share. Do you have to be so unfriendly to other shrews?

Pygmy Shrew: I'm not when it's breeding time – that's when we need each other.

Fun Fact

Pygmy shrews only live for about a year, but females can have two or more litters of around six babies in that time!

Pygmy shrews are fast – and their heartbeats are even faster, beating up to 1,200 times per minute. It's absolutely shrew – er, I mean true!



Wildlife Food Treasures

ENDANGERED
CREATURE
FEATURE

The remarkable animals featured on these two pages are far from ordinary. Each one is a marvel with its unique abilities and features. Yet they all share a grim bond – humans think of them as food treasures. You won't find these creatures on your dining table in the UK, but in other parts of the world, their meat or body parts are still sought after.

So, let's spotlight their fight for survival.

Pangolins – an animal that looks like a pine cone

Pangolins are unique, scaly mammals that feast on ants and termites, using their long sticky tongues. The **Indian pangolin** is the smallest of the eight species – no bigger than a house cat. The **giant ground pangolin** is the largest and heaviest, reaching over 1.2 metres long. Pangolins move quite slowly, and they roll into a ball when threatened.

Sadly, their armour doesn't shield them from humans, their biggest threat. Some Asian cultures consider pangolin meat a **delicacy**. Their keratin scales are also prized in traditional Chinese medicine.

Despite a 2016 ban, an alarming **one million pangolins** were taken from nature in the past decade. Their numbers continue to dwindle, putting them in danger of disappearing for ever.



Gorillas – the hunted cousins

Our closest animal relatives, gorillas, face a similar plight.

They've been hunted for **bushmeat** across Africa for many centuries. In remote, poverty-stricken areas, gorilla hunting is more than just tradition – it's a matter of survival. It provides crucial nutrition for families living in harsh conditions. They also sell gorilla meat to get money. Rich town-dwellers, who view ape meat as a status symbol, fuel this demand.

Sadly, the hunting endangers gorilla populations, especially **mountain gorillas** and **eastern lowland gorillas**.

To keep gorillas safe in the wild, we need vigilant patrols in parts of Africa where gorillas are found. We also need to enable local people to benefit from protecting gorillas instead of hunting them.



Sea turtles – majestic marine travellers

Sea turtles, cherished for their meat and eggs, are also under threat. This is especially true in coastal communities, where they nest. Many Asian cultures and people living on Pacific islands think sea turtle meat is very special, and they believe it's good for their health.

Enforcing bans on hunting sea turtles can be challenging, especially in remote areas. Even though there are rules against it, people still eat turtle meat and eggs illegally in many places around the world, from Australia and the Caribbean to Central and South America.

To keep sea turtles safe, we have to protect their nesting sites. We also need to educate local people about the importance of sea turtles and make sure rules are followed to stop **poaching**.



Sharks – more than just fins

Sharks are often hunted for their **fins**, which are used to make a special Asian soup.

The cruel process of **shark finning** involves slicing off a shark's fins and throwing the rest of the body back into the sea. Every year, around **70 million sharks** are killed for their fins! This has led to global declines in shark numbers.

By choosing not to eat shark fin soup and supporting efforts to ban shark finning, we can help keep sharks safe in the ocean.

Vocabulary

Bushmeat: Meat from wild animals, such as monkeys or antelope.

Delicacy: A special and tasty food, usually something rare or expensive.

Poaching: The illegal taking, hunting or catching of wildlife.

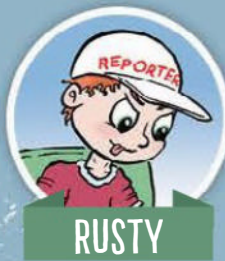




AMY



RHONA



RUSTY



SIMON



CHARLIE

SHOULD WE FEED WILD ANIMALS?

By JD Savage

Amy: Let's debate whether feeding wild animals helps or harms them. You're on Team 'Leave Them Be', aren't you, Simon?

Simon: Yes, feeding them might make them lazy. What if they lose their natural hunting and **foraging** skills?

Amy: Well, let's start by asking *why* we like feeding them so much.

Rhona: It's a nature-lover thing! We like to feel like we're bonding with wild creatures. After all, they won't let us pet them, we can't chat with them—

Charlie: Ahem!

Rhona: Sorry, Charlie, *most* of us can't chat with them – and it's a way of getting them to stay still for our nature selfies.

Amy: It's also like inviting them to dinner to show we're friends. We want them to trust us.

Simon: But they shouldn't! They're *wild* wonders. We shouldn't try to tame them.

Rhona: We wouldn't want some animals to think of humans as food providers. You wouldn't want 'gators in gardens or bears at barbecues.

Amy: Agreed, but let's start with wild birds. Lots of us feed them – but should we?

Rusty: The pond in our park is like a bread buffet for ducks!

Rhona: Despite a big sign saying “**PLEASE DON'T FEED THE DUCKS BREAD**”. Everyone just ignores it.

Rusty: They fling whole slices at them!

Simon: I think birds shouldn't be eating *any* human food.

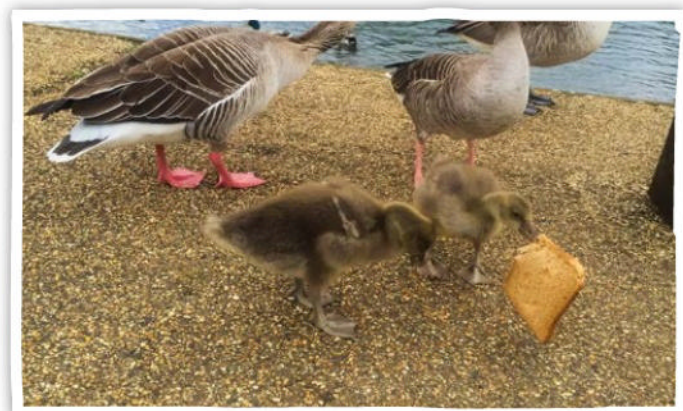
Charlie: Well, a duck told me she loved bread.



Amy: I'm sure she does – but it's a bit like junk food for birds. It makes them feel full but doesn't give them what they need to grow and stay healthy.

Rhona: So, it's a no-no?

Amy: It's OK in small amounts – as long as it's part of a mixed diet with other, healthier stuff. And it's best to make it damp first.



Rhona: But the park pond has piles of it. Those ducks are on a major bread binge!

Amy: Yes, which can pollute the water and damage their habitat.

Charlie: So, it's better to throw sweetcorn – or birdseed or duck pellets from a pet shop – at the park?

Simon: Or if nobody fed them, you'd see them snack on insects and grasses, their natural nibbles. Much better!

Amy: Well, what about garden bird feeders? They can provide fine dining for birds.



Simon: I still reckon they stop birds from looking after themselves – so they become dependent on us.

Rhona: Well, do you know what the RSPB says about that?

Charlie: RSPB? What does that stand for?

Rhona: Rusty, stop pinching biscuits!

Charlie: Really???

Rhona: No, sorry, Rusty just crept off, and I heard the biscuit tin rattle in the kitchen. Come back, Rusty! It stands for the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. But a Royal Society for the Protection of Biscuits wouldn't be a bad idea when Rusty's around!

Amy: What's their take, then?



Rhona: That it's just a nice bonus to their natural diet. It doesn't replace it or affect their foraging. And bird feeders help birds to survive tough times like freezing winters. Sorry, Simon.

Vocabulary

Foraging (say "foh-ri-jing"): Searching widely for food.





Simon: No worries. I love weirdness, and it's *very* weird for me to be wrong about anything.

Amy: Bird feeders aren't harmful, then?

Rhona: Sometimes they are. Birds can come into contact with bacteria on them that spreads disease from bird to bird.

Charlie: Should we bin our bird feeders, then?

Rhona: Don't worry, they're great if we wash them regularly. The advice is to feed birds little and often, so the food doesn't get mould growing on it or get too exposed to the weather.

Rusty: We had a bird feeder, but our genius cat Luke Skywhisker would lie in wait for the birds.

Amy: Yes, if your garden has a feline prowler, at least hang your feeder very high.

Rhona: What about feeding foxes if you have a garden they visit?

Amy: It's OK to leave a small amount of food out for them, especially in a hard winter or during very dry periods.

Charlie: A fox told me they bury their food as fast as possible to eat later. If you leave lots, they may start redecorating your neighbours' gardens!

Simon: And don't hand-feed them. They can bite – and may become fearless enough to approach people who aren't fox fans. Being wary of humans can help wildlife survive.



Rhona: How about squirrels? Helping them out with a nut or two shouldn't hurt.

Simon: Sure – but they don't *need* help. And when they get used to it, they sometimes bite human hands, thinking they hold nuts.

Amy: There's no easy answer, is there? Feeding wild animals has both positive and negative sides.

Rusty: Yes, like our Wildlife News section: the negative side – Rhona's pages; and the positive side – my page!





Eco Kids
planet

Giant Panda
Asia

Indian Rhinoceros

Pair Feeding on the
Same Branch



WILDLIFE NEWS!

Why do gentoo penguins love pretty pebbles? That's just *ONE* of the things you'll discover this month!



RHONA REPORTS! NO. 52

And don't forget about me - Rusty!

Rhona's helper: JD Savage

BARNACLE BALL!

The **British Wildlife Photography Awards** showcase nature photography here in Britain. It's a great reminder of what treasures our woodlands, wetlands and other habitats still hold. This year, both amateur and professional photographers wowed the judges with over 14,000 incredible images, all vying for the £5,000 grand prize. And guess what! I'm sharing some of the most awesome winning shots with you.



© Ryan Stalker/British Wildlife Photography Award

Ryan Stalker's **Ocean Drifter** took the top prize. At first glance, you might mistake this for a regular football floating along. But peek below the waterline, and you'll discover a colony of creatures clinging to it!

Meet the **goose barnacles**. They don't call the UK home, but sometimes, during fierce Atlantic storms, they hitch a ride to our shores. Imagine the adventures this drifting ball went on! It probably soaked up some tropical sunshine where these barnacles usually live. Perhaps it roamed the vast ocean for years before ending up on an English beach, only to return to the sea, where Ryan captured its photo.

"The football was washed up in Dorset after making a huge ocean journey across the Atlantic," he says. "More rubbish in the sea could increase the risk of more creatures making it to our shores and becoming invasive species."

Invasive species can be even bigger troublemakers than Rusty, wreaking havoc on local environments, driving species to extinction, and creating chaos. We don't want them sneaking in with our pollution!

Isn't a **BARNacle** where you keep a **HORSEacle**?
Rusty

NEWSFLASH!

A peculiar group of **water voles**, living far from any water, are digging under Glasgow, Scotland, like moles! The Mammal Society is setting up a new wildlife group to study them.

RUNNING ON WATER

Hey, it's a scooting coot! Max Wood took this picture.

"I woke up at 4.45am with the hope of capturing backlit waterfowl images at Frensham Pond in Surrey. I lay down at the edge of the pond and waited for the birds to become active. As the morning progressed, rays of sunlight began to shine through trees along the edge of the pond, creating spotlights in the morning

mist. This coot was fleeing a fight, running across the water to take flight through the mist and rays of light."

Max's stunning image not only won him the title of **RSPB Young British Wildlife Photographer of the Year** but also crowned him champion in the **15-17 age category!**

That coot looks like it's heard Rhona singing and is dashing for cover!

I'm an excellent singer, Rusty, as you well know!



© Max Wood/British Wildlife Photography Award

FINE PHEASANT PHOTO!

Jamie Smart took the **11-and-Under category** winner: **Spring Treasures**.

He says, "We got up very, very early one cold (-5°C), misty morning in spring to try to find some boxing hares up on the moorland. On our way there, I spotted this pheasant sitting on a farm gate in the morning sunrise. I made Dad stop the car and reverse slowly, quietly opened my car window, and managed



© Jamie Smart/British Wildlife Photography Award

NEWSFLASH!

A new **sea slug** species with feathery side gills was discovered in UK waters!



© Ross Bullimore/Cefas

to get this photo of him in all his beauty, with the blackthorn blossom behind him and the sun rays lighting up his copper breast feathers. As it happens, we didn't get to see any hares boxing that morning, but Mr Pheasant making this appearance really made up for it!"

NEWSFLASH!

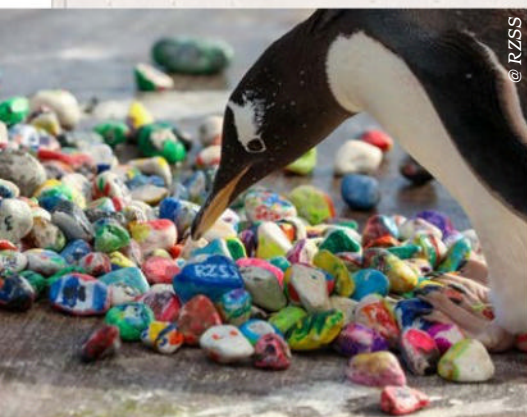
A postman found a large, rare, endangered **eel** swimming in a puddle on a Dorset road – probably stranded by a flood. He used a Royal Mail tray to deliver it to a nearby lake!

NEWSFLASH!

Rare **red squirrels** aren't just surviving but thriving on Essex's Mersea Island after 27 were released there over 10 years ago. Now there are up to **100 reds!**



PAINTED PENGUIN PEBBLES!



Edinburgh Zoo's **gentoo penguins** were given pretty, painted pebbles to celebrate the start of breeding season. Gentoo penguins make nests out of stones, and males give pebbles as gifts to their partners!

Kids supported by Edinburgh Children's Hospital Charity (EGHC) decorated them as part of the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland's weekly interactive sessions at the Royal Hospital for Children and Young People.

NEWSFLASH!

A wildlife watcher filmed two **pine martens** playing on a kids' swing set in his Highlands garden. They do it every night!

FUNNY PHOTO AWARDS!

The **2024 Comedy Wildlife Awards** contest opened on 16th March with a new name (and sponsor) – **Nikon Comedy Wildlife Awards** – and new categories for its 10th anniversary.

It's open to everyone, with a special kids' category for under 16s, and it's free to enter. Find out how on its website: www.comedywildlifephoto.com. The competition closes on 31st July.

The contest highlights the funnier side of nature,

but it's really all about supporting conservation with its partner, Whitley Fund for Nature.

To celebrate, they've released some unseen entries from last year and here's my favourite: **I Just Think You're Otter This World** by Emeline Robert Pottorff.



© Emeline Robert Pottorff / Comedy Wildlife Awards

NEWSFLASH!

Earth's **earliest fossilised forest** was discovered in cliffs in Minehead along the coast of south-west England. It's around **400 million years old!**

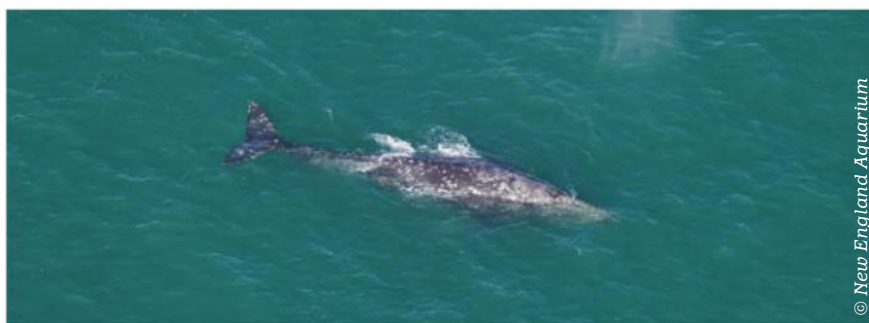
RARE WHALE SIGHTING!

The New England Aquarium aerial survey team sighted a **grey whale** in the Atlantic Ocean – where they've been extinct for over 200 years!

They're still regularly found in the North Pacific Ocean but had

disappeared from the Atlantic by the 18th century, wiped out by hunting. This one was a long way from its usual migration route.

Climate change melted the thick winter ice that usually blocks their passage there. This surprise sighting may only be the beginning!



© New England Aquarium

RUSTY'S REPORT!



GET MATEY WITH MOLLUSCS!

Hi, Rusty fans!

We should make friends with slugs and snails. That's what the Royal Horse Cuddling Society (*Horticultural Society, Rusty!!*) and Wildlife Trusts say.

Well, I already like them. Rhona says she does, too, but she didn't seem that

thrilled when I brought a load into the house last summer. Mind you, I did put them on her salad – but they looked so hungry!

Did you know there are around 150 species in the UK? Not of Rhona – that would be a nightmare! I mean slugs and snails (which are like slugs with crash helmets, which makes them extra cool).

The problem is that many gardeners think of them as pests. OK, so a small number do munch on certain plants, but they're a great clean-up crew.

Most eat rotting plants, fungi, dung and even dead animals (if our cat Luke

Skywhisker doesn't get there first). Even their poo helps to improve the soil. Plus, species that need to get their numbers up, like thrushes and hedgehogs, eat *them*. It's a pity I can't train them to clean up after *me*, so Rhona and Mum would stop moaning!

Anyway, this project is called **Making Friends with Molluscs** (that's just a fancy name to call them). It's to teach gardeners how to love them. It'll even show them how to create habitats that may make molluscs less likely to glide into their veggie beds.

Spread the word like a slug spreads slime!

Rusty

Rusty leaves a much messier trail than a snail's!
Rhona



AMELIA THE FOX

KOALA DIET
by RICHY K. CHANDLER

AMELIA,
DOES THIS
RESTAURANT
JUST SERVE
FOOD FOR
FOXES?

YEAH, VAL, BUT
A FOX'S DIET IS SO
VARIED, THERE'S LOADS
ON THE MENU!

I CAN SEE
THAT! MAIN
COURSES INCLUDE

Rat,
Mouse,
Vole,
Rabbit...
Hedgehog?!

WELL, I DON'T
EAT THOSE MYSELF,
BUT FOXES HAVE
HAD TO ADAPT, EATING
WHAT THEY CAN FIND
WHEREVER THEY ARE
IN THE WORLD!

MAYBE TRY
A COUPLE OF
STARTERS?

Beetle,
Cricket,
Slug,
Spider AND
THREE DIFFERENT
Worm DISHES?!

SORRY, AMELIA,
THIS IS NOT FOR ME.

PERHAPS TODAY'S
SPECIALS MIGHT BE
MORE APPEALING?

ERM... Snake,
Fish,
Eggs,
Frog,
Sparrow?

I GUESS
NOT.

GOOD EVENING.
MAY I TAKE YOUR
ORDER?



THE Berries
PLEASE,
AND IS IT
POSSIBLE TO
ORDER OFF
MENU FOR
MY FRIEND?

WELL, WE HAVE A
COUPLE OF NEW
CHEFS... LET ME SEE
WHAT I CAN DO...

CHEERS,
MATE!

THE THING
IS, AMELIA, I ONLY
EAT EUCALYPTUS
LEAVES!

THEY'RE POISONOUS,
BUT NOT TO US
KOALAS! WE TAKE A
LONG TIME DIGESTING
THEM TO EXTRACT AS
MUCH ENERGY AS
POSSIBLE, AS WELL
AS MOST OF THE
WATER WE NEED.

GOOD JOB THERE
ARE 600 TYPES OF
EUCALYPTUS TREE
IN AUSTRALIA,
WHERE YOU LIVE!

TRUE, BUT
I ONLY EAT
A FEW TYPES!
SUPER-FUSSY,
RIGHT?!

YOUR BERRIES,
MADAM...

THANK YOU!

AND FOR
YOU...

EUCALYPTUS
LEAVES AND A GOOD
SORT, TOO! HOW DID
YOU KNOW?!

OH! OUR NEW
CHEFS HAPPEN
TO BE A GREATER
GLIDER AND A
RINGTAIL
POSSUM!

THAT'S RIGHT, THE
ONLY OTHER MAMMALS
WHO ARE HAPPY JUST
EATING EUCALYPTUS
LEAVES!

BON
APPETIT!

WHAT ARE
THE ODDS?!

MUNCH
MUNCH

Richy



ANIMAL DINING ADAPTATIONS

Amy's helper: Daisy Fox



Hey, did you know that animals are absolute champions when it comes to adapting to their habitats?

Over thousands of years, they've developed unique abilities and physical features – tongues, noses, beaks, humps and teeth – to help them thrive in their local lands.

Imagine having a neck as long as a giraffe's to nibble on treetop leaves or a hump like a camel's to endure months without water.

Let's discover some of the most **marvellously adapted** eaters in the animal kingdom!

Giant anteater – a long-tongued, perky-nosed, ant-gobbling machine

The giant anteater lives in Central and South America. This phenomenal creature measures about 1.8m from its elongated snout to its bushy tail. Its scientific family name is *vermilingua*, which translates to **worm tongue**. Quite a name, right?

The giant anteater is perfectly adapted to catch its favourite prey (the clue is in the name!). It may not be able to see or hear very well, but its **sense of smell** is a force to be reckoned with. Believe it or not, it can tell which species of ant or termite is nearby just by sniffing! If it likes what's on the menu, it will tear apart the anthill or termite mound with its **powerful claws**.

Now, here's the fun part: the anteater's tongue is 60cm long and always coated in **sticky saliva**. Gross or cool? You decide. But it can flick it in and out at lightning speed, up to **150 times a minute**. Now that's an ant-eating marvel!



Star-nosed mole – the speedy snack snatcher

What's the **fastest eater** in the animal kingdom? You might guess a ravenous cheetah or a swooping falcon, right? Well, let's dig a little deeper – literally! I'm talking about a creature that's neither fast nor furious. Rather, it's small, furry and nearly blind. It's the unassuming mole, but not just any mole – meet **the star-nosed mole**.

Its favourite foods are insects, small fish and worms. It searches for them with a set of 22 highly sensitive pink tentacles on its nose. The mole can touch up to a whopping **12 objects per second** in search of food. It eats so quickly that it's too swift for our eyes to track. Blink and you've missed the entire meal!

The star-nosed mole loves damp places like marshes and riverbanks, and has an unusual way of **underwater sniffing**. It



blows bubbles while swimming and then inhales them back to check if they've picked up the scent of prey.

So, there you have it, a true underdog (or should we say, undermole?) story. The world's fastest eater isn't a sleek, airborne falcon or a swift-footed cheetah, but a nearly blind mole with a star for a nose!

Bats – feasting fliers in the night

Every year, from May to September, the UK skies come alive with bats swooping for prey around sunset.

Bats are experts at hunting in mid-air. They use sharp hearing and echolocation to seek out insects. Even the UK's smallest bat, the **common pipistrelle**, can gobble up around 3,000 insects a night – a third of its weight in bugs. That's like you munching on seven large, fully-loaded pizzas – daily!



Then we have the **vampire bats** of Mexico and Central and South America. Gliding silently through the night, they can sense the breathing of sleeping animals like horses, cows and pigs.

They may be named after vampires, but they don't suck blood. Their teeth make small, painless cuts in the skin of an animal, then they lap up the blood with their tongues. They are so gentle that they can drink for a long time – up to half an hour – without their food source waking up.



Here's a fun fact – if they find a particularly tasty host, they remember the sound of its breathing and return to it the following night. Just like going back to a favourite restaurant!



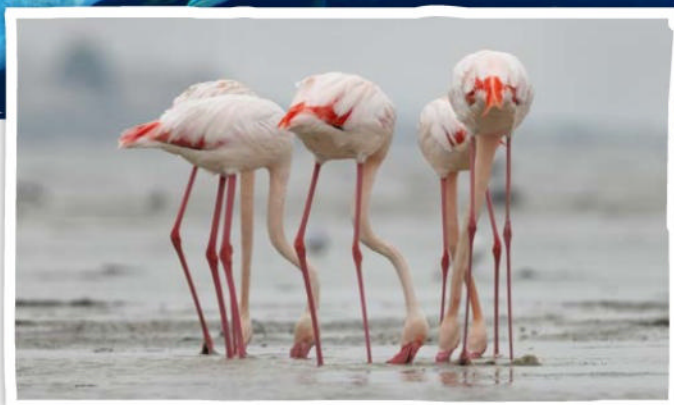
Magnificent filter feeders

Remember the mighty blue whale, that awesome filter feeder we explored earlier in this mag? Well, there's another giant of the sea that shares its unique dining method – the **whale shark**.

Yes, the ocean's largest fish is also a formidable filter feeder.

They feast by gliding through the seas with their mouths wide open to filter **plankton** and small fish from the water. Once they've gathered enough, they close their massive jaws and swallow the captured prey.

This filter-feeding style allows whale sharks to devour huge meals without wasting energy on hunting.



Now, let's meet the **flamingo**, a feathered maestro of filter feeding. These wading birds have similar **strainer-like plates** in their beak.

They feed with their heads upside down, sifting out yummy bugs and crustaceans from the water. Flamingos' beaks are the perfect shape for seeking out food. The bottom part of the beak is larger and stronger than the top. As the bird swings its head back and forth, water flows through the beak. Then its plump tongue moves quickly to help pump water through.

Did You Know

A group of flamingos is called a **flamboyance**. It's easy to see why, as they flock together with their beautiful pink feathers.



Teeth galore: the chomping champions

Carnivore, omnivore or herbivore, teeth are certainly handy when you've got a big appetite.

Sharks have been swimming in our oceans for millions of years. Over that time, their teeth have **evolved** into perfect tools for their dining needs. Some have flat teeth for grinding, while others sport needle-like ones for firm gripping. Some species even have pointed, triangular saws to slice prey up into chunks.



Sharks, on average, have between 50 and 300 teeth, which regularly fall out. Luckily, they are promptly replaced with new ones. Some sharks can get through a staggering 30,000 teeth in their lifetime!

That sounds like a lot of gnashers, but wait until you hear about the humble garden snail.

A **garden snail** has about **14,000 tiny teeth** arranged in rows on a **radula**, something like a tongue. Its jaws snap off pieces of food, which are then ground up by the raspy radula.



Snail's teeth are tough, too, especially those of a **limpet**, a sea snail found clinging on tight to rocks on the beach. In fact, a limpet tooth is the **strongest known biological material on Earth!**

Did You Know

Long-extinct giant shark the **megalodon** had teeth measuring nearly 18cm. That's about the same length as the world's smallest shark – the **dwarf lanternshark**.





WHEN EATING GETS WEIRD!

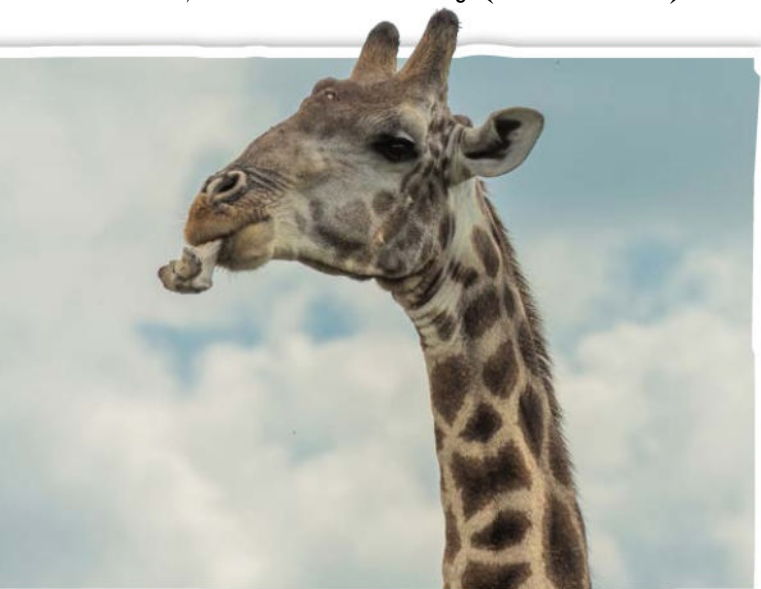
Simon's helper: JD Savage



I've heard so many wild things about weird animal eating habits, I just had to dig deeper to see if they were true...

Do giraffes eat bones?

Giraffes are gentle giants that munch on vegetation all day. Those long necks are handy for reaching leaves at the top of towering trees. But do they also snack on skeletons? It turns out they do – and they not only bite bones but also feed on horns, antlers and ivory (from tusks).



They chew and suck on them, slurping out their juices, rather than swallowing them. But why do these greenery-gobblers even do that? They're likely taking in extra minerals (calcium and phosphorus) from them to keep their *own* bones strong and healthy.

SIMON'S STUMPER

How many more neckbones does a giraffe have than a human? The answer's waiting below.

Can huge crocs go a year without eating?



Crocodiles are mega meat-munchers, chomping down on prey with their crushing jaws. They're not picky eaters, either, feasting on everything they can, from unsuspecting **mammals** to **fish**, **birds** and **turtles**. They usually have a big meal about once a week. Yet here's the jaw-dropping fact: the largest ones can go many months without taking a single bite!

After a massive meal, their bodies are so good at slowly turning food into energy that they can live off it for a year or so if necessary. So can large alligators.

QUICK QUIZ

Surprise – it's the same number: seven. Theirs are just super-sized!

Which birds eat dirt?

In Peru's Amazon jungle, up to 18 species of **parrot** lick away at its clay cliffs. They flock there especially, flying for miles to dine on dirt. Why? Clay is rich in sodium, a mineral found in salt. They may be eating it to get that, as well as calcium and iron to stay healthy.



And some might eat plants with poisonous parts. The dirt possibly binds to those bad bits, protecting the birds. Consuming a cliff suddenly makes sense. Yet other parrots in the area avoid the cliffs and *don't* crave clay, so this one is still filed under Weird!

Which fish eat rocks?



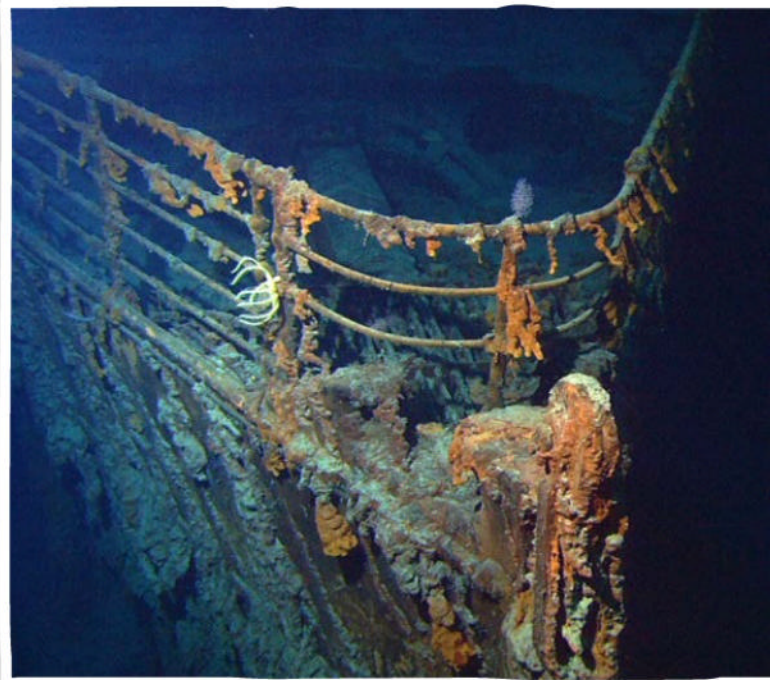
From parrots to **parrotfish**. Do you like crunchy breakfasts? Parrotfish keep it crunchy every meal, taking bites out of coral and rocks in their hunt for the tiny

plant-like creatures called **algae**. Their jaws are powerful enough to bite through rock and grind it into tiny grains. It comes out of their other end as fine white sand.



Yes, those gorgeous white tropical beaches we long to lie on are parrotfish poo!

Are animals eating the Titanic?



The Titanic, the legendary massive ship once claimed to be unsinkable, has been resting on the ocean bed since hitting an iceberg in 1912. I heard it became an underwater habitat for creatures feeding on it.

Indeed! A species of tiny bacteria that creates rust and then eats it is feasting on the ship's iron and steel. Experts think this clean-up crew will soon eat the entire ship.

Some animals have weird ways of catching prey.



Have you ever played with super-soaker water blasters? Imagine having a built-in one! **Archerfish** spit water jets to knock insects off branches and leaves, sending them into the water for a snack. They can hit targets up to two metres away! They use these jets to hunt *underwater*, too.



Narwhals use their tusk to hit and stun fish before gobbling them up!



Sea stars (also known as **starfish**) turn themselves inside out to eat. They extend their stomach out of their mouth and over the prey. After partly digesting it, their stomach returns inside their body!

Freaky Feasting Fact

Termites eat human houses – at least, they do if they have wooden parts, like many American homes. These little insects wreak havoc on timber structures!

ALARMING EATERS!

Ulp! It's time to ask **which animals eat...**

...their own kind?

Quite a few, including **tiger sharks**, which eat their brothers and sisters in the womb before they're even born.

Some **female spiders**, including **black widows**, eat their mates after mating. **African social spider** mums allow their babies to eat *them* soon after they're born.



...their droppings?

Rabbits, chimpanzees, hedgehogs and guinea pigs are just some of the creatures that do this. It sounds disgusting, but dining on droppings seems to help deliver important nutrients many animals need to live and grow.



...the most humans?

Crocodiles? Lions? I'd say it's teeny 0.3mm-long **eyelash mites** that live on almost all of us, eating dead skin cells!

Many animals happily nibble on leaves and stalks, of course – but do plants ever fight back?



You bet! Some trees and smaller plants are packed with foul-tasting chemicals that they can release when an animal starts munching on them. (Yes, they *know* they're being chomped!) They even release chemicals into the air to warn nearby plants to ramp up their own defences – or to attract enemies of some insects that feast on them.



Of course, some plants eat meat. Most of us know about **Venus flytraps**, which snap their traps shut on any unfortunate insect brushing their hairs. But did you know there **over 600 species** of meat-eating plants?

Scarlet sundew plants seem to drip with dew to attract bugs. Really, it's sticky stuff to trap them – and the plant's tentacles snap forward to throw them into the trap!



CASE HISTORY: A HUMAN-EATING TREE?



But were there ever plants that could catch and feed on *us*? Legends about such plants existed for many years,

most famously of the **Man-Eating Tree of Madagascar**.

It was first reported in 1874 in Germany and later in a New York newspaper. The tree was said to resemble a giant, thick pineapple with long, green tendrils that coiled around its human prey. It captured imaginations for over 10 years, but my research revealed that these tales were simply that: made-up tales.

Nobody has ever discovered plants capable of scoffing humans. Phew! Now I can go back into the garden again!

SIMON'S VERDICT: FALSE!

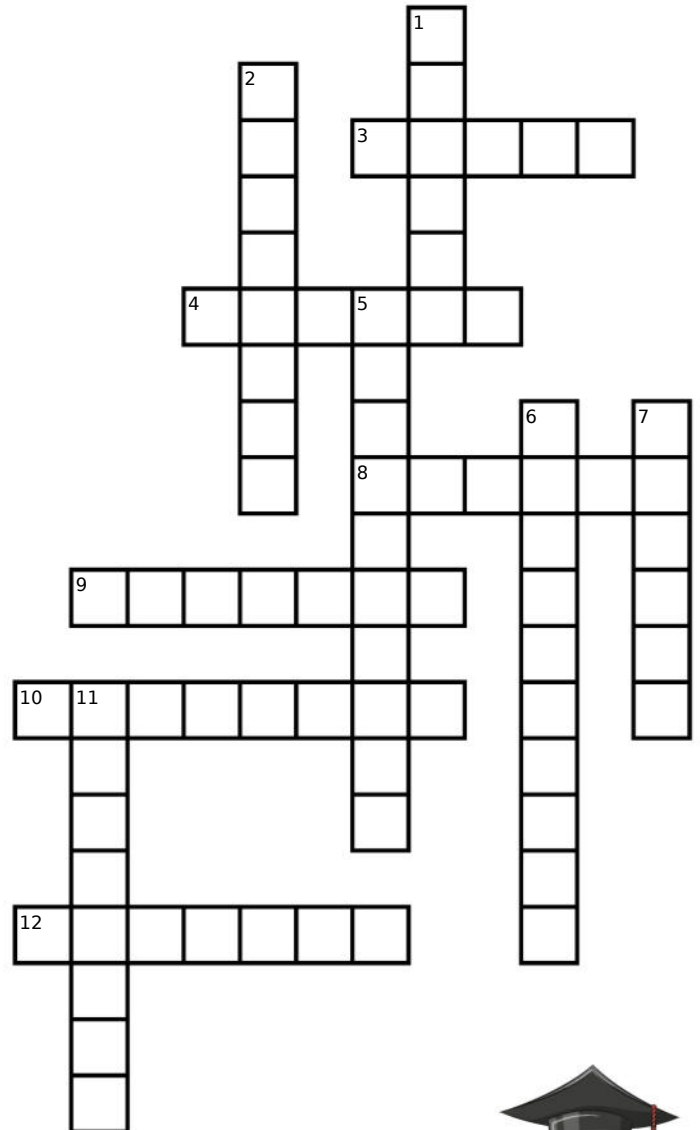
FEASTY CROSSWORD

Down:

1. To search widely for food.
2. An avian filter-feeder.
5. Which fish eats rocks?
6. Koalas' favourite tree, known for its aromatic leaves.
7. Favourite food of the giant panda.
11. A long-nosed mammal feasting on ants.

Across:

3. Primary food source for the largest mammal on Earth.
4. A marine mollusc clinging to rocks.
8. A snail's version of the tongue.
9. What do pygmy shrews munch on?
10. A mammal covered with scales.
12. What do vultures usually feed on?



WILD QUESTIONS

Test your knowledge with these multiple-choice questions. No wild guesses!

1. Which of these animals are picky eaters?

- a. Grizzly bears
- b. Koalas
- c. Foxes
- d. Pigs

2. Which animal is known as the fastest eater?

- a. Pygmy shrew
- b. Hummingbird
- c. Star-nosed mole
- d. Blue whale

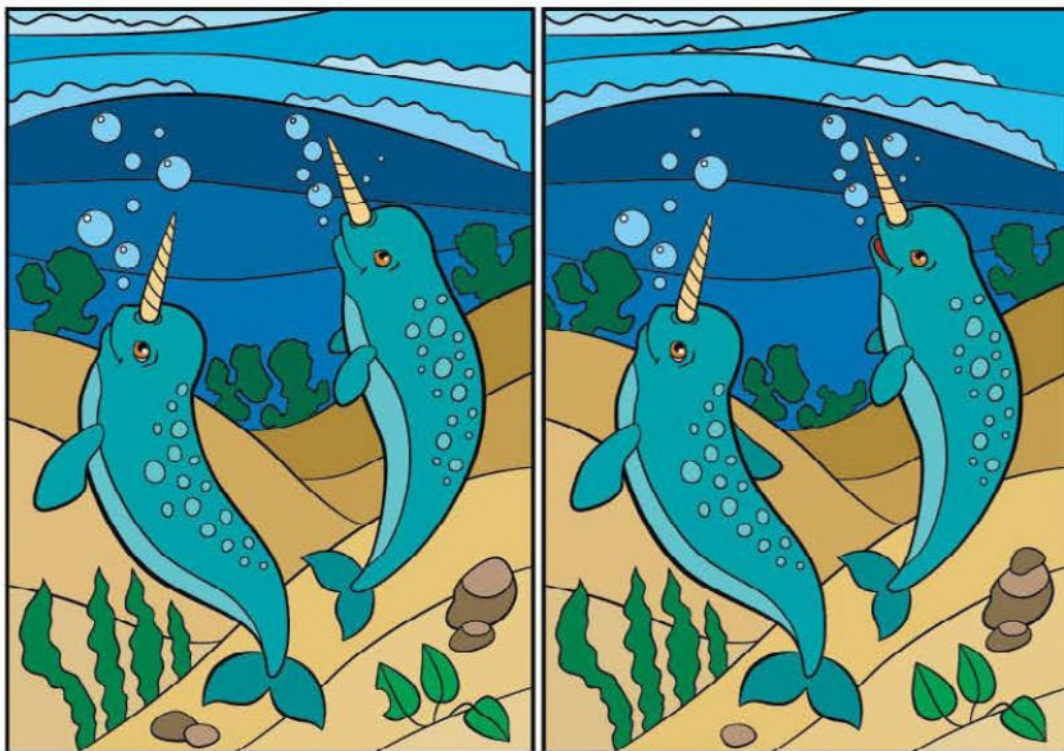
3. Which of these animals are hunted for their meat?

- a. Cows
- b. Giant anteaters
- c. Giant pandas
- d. Gorillas

4. What is feeding on the legendary Titanic?

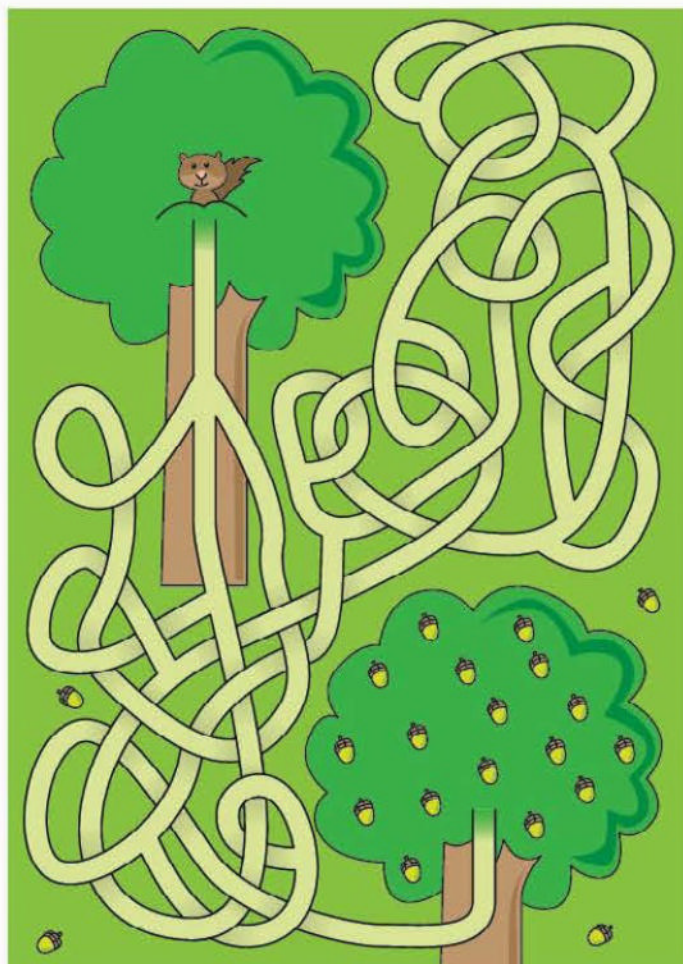
- a. Parrotfish
- b. Tiny bacteria
- c. Starfish
- d. Anglerfish

Spot 12 Differences

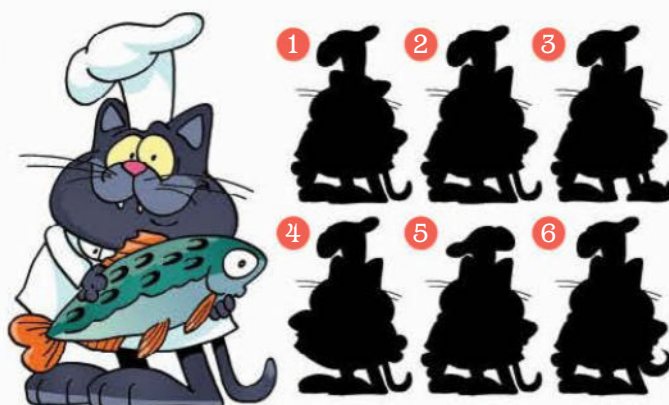


SQUIRREL MAZE

Help the little squirrel find its way to the tree with acorns.



FIND THE CORRECT SHADOW



JOKE CORNER



Find the answers on page 33.

COMPETITIONS AND LETTERS

In our 'Amazing Eyes' February edition, we dared you to dream of having an extra pair of eyes... or maybe two! A massive shout-out to everyone who joined in. Your entries were brilliantly inventive, wildly insightful, and absolutely captivating.

Kudos to our four winners:



Amelia, age 8,
Livingston

Magical eyesight
I would like to have a perfect eyesight so I use 4 different pairs from different animals.
One from eagle to see 5 times farther so I can spot everything over 3 km away and also I can zoom in on tiny objects which is cool.
One from spider to see 2,000 times better than other people in the dark. So I can play hide and seek in the dark and be always the winner!
One from bee so I can see ultraviolet light on flowers, which I love!
One from rabbit so I can see almost 360° around me both up and down. I do not need to move my head to see everything!

Ariana, age 11,
London





Seren, age 12,
Loughborough

In this picture, I have a total of seven amazing eyes – all of which are seen in nature.

In the centre of my forehead, there is a chameleon eye; this is used for 360° vision and moves independently from the rest of the eyes. I can also see ultraviolet light through this eye!

On either side of the chameleon eye is a cat eye. These eyes allow me to have enhanced night vision and help me react to super-fast movements. However, I only see a dulled colour spectrum through these eyes.

Above all the other eyes sit fly eyes. These amazing eyes are compound and allow 'slow-mo' vision. These eyes sit atop snail stalks.

And of course, my amazing human eyes! ●●

Sadie, age 7,
Portsoy



my extra eyes give me the super power of infrared vision and allows me to have a 360° view I can see mammals lurking behind me.

To see more of your amazing entries, go to
www.ecokidsplanet.co.uk/amazing-eyes-competition

Answers

Wild Questions

- b
- c
- d
- b

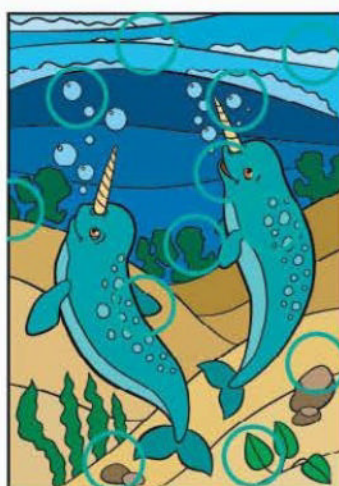
The Correct Shadow

2

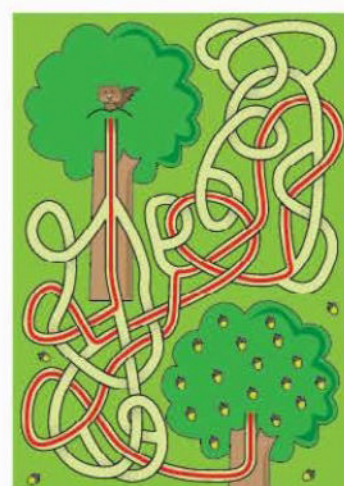
Crossword



Spot 12 Differences



Squirrel Maze





Monthly Project

Stinging Nettle & Citrus Biscuits

Forage, cook and enjoy!

Did you know that you can go on a walk and find safe, healthy and wild foods to create easy dishes at home? Wild edibles are right under our nose, waiting to be found.

Let's begin with a family favourite – biscuits. But not just any biscuits – these are made with... nettles! I can almost hear your surprised gulp! Nettles, those prickly, stinging plants? Eat them?

Absolutely! Nettles, those seemingly grumpy plants that sting, can be turned into something delicious and nutritious.

If you're young, you'll need a grown-up helper to handle the boiling water. And don't forget some gloves if you don't want to get stung! Nettles lose their sting after boiling water is poured over them, so you can then chop them up without gloves.

Ingredients:

- 40g or roughly two adult handfuls of nettle tips (the top four leaves are ideal)
- 200g butter
- 200g caster sugar
- 420g plain flour
- 1 egg
- Zest of two lemons or other citrus fruit and 2 tbsp of the juice.

Method:

1. Boil a kettle full of water. Pour it over your nettles in a colander placed in the sink.



2. Once they cool down, squeeze out the excess water and chop them finely.



3. In a mixing bowl, cream together your butter, sugar and egg.

4. Add in your chopped nettles, along with the zest and juice.



5. Using a spatula or spoon, gently stir in the flour until the mix starts to come together. Finish your dough by hand.



6. Pop it in the fridge for half an hour. Then, roll out the dough on a lightly floured surface until it's about 5mm thick.



7. Cut into shapes with a cutter of your choice.

8. Bake in the oven on a parchment-lined baking tray at 190°C/ 170°C fan/Gas Mark 5 for 12-14 min or until golden.

9. Leave them to cool on a baking rack.

And voila! You've turned a prickly plant into a treat that's sure to impress. Enjoy your delicious nettle biscuits!

Bunny Pancake Art

MONTHLY COMPETITION

This month, we're inviting you and your favourite grown-up to a fun-filled pancake decorating contest!

Your mission is to craft adorable Easter bunny-shaped pancakes, using different coloured batters and toppings like fruit, chocolate chips and whipped cream. From bunny ears to fluffy tails, let your imaginations run wild as you create your edible work of art. Before you gobble up your yummy bunny masterpiece, make sure you snap a picture for our contest. The most creative and skilfully decorated pancakes will win.



FOUR lucky readers will win this delightful cookbook by Annabel Karmel.

4 TO WIN!

My First Cookbook

By **Annabel Karmel**

Put on your aprons – it's time to get cooking with the UK's best-selling children's cookery author!

Explore fun recipes like Monster Pizzas, Sticky Chicken and Teddy Bear Pasta, along with tempting, easy-to-make treats such as banana and blueberry loaf cake and Oreo brownies. Children will learn essential hands-on kitchen skills, from simple sandwich making all the way to cake baking. Each recipe is easy to follow, beautifully



photographed, and features hilarious illustrations from award-nominated artist Alex Willmore.

RRP: £12.99

How to enter the competition: Send a photo of your bunny pancake to win@ecokidsplanet.co.uk. Your submission must arrive before **10th May 2024**. Don't forget to include your full name, age and address, so we know how to reach you.

IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF ECO KIDS PLANET

Issue 115

May 2024

OH - DEER!

Deer Weiridness

Simon discovers...

BUCK BATTLES

Amy explores...

Deer Hunting

Eco Kids debate...

UK DEER

Six different kinds...

SIBERIAN MUSK DEER **ENDANGERED CREATURE FEATURE**

THE ULTIMATE DEER Q&A

All you need to know!



Charlie Meets a Pudu

The world's smallest deer species



ecokidsplanet.co.uk