

# Strange but True: Animals

Humans have long been fascinated by the animal kingdom. By sharing the Earth with a whole plethora of species, we have learnt a great deal about the animals that also inhabit it. However, there are some creatures whose traits, behaviours and physical characteristics can still astonish us. Read on to find out more about some of the animal kingdom's most bizarre and baffling phenomena.

## Cuddly Criminals?

The koala — native to the forests of Australia — is an iconic mammal, known for its trademark tree-hugging pose and cute, fluffy appearance. It may surprise you to learn that these furry creatures have fingerprints that are almost identical to those of human beings. The loops and whorls are unique to each koala and are more similar to human fingerprints than those of chimpanzees. One scientist has even warned the Australian police to be aware of the similarity in the rare event that they may be confused at a crime scene!



## Frozen Alive



Many of us are familiar with the term 'frozen solid'. However, there is a unique breed of frog in North America that becomes just that for up to seven months of the year. In September, the wood frog enters a frozen state: their heart stops beating and their blood no longer flows. However, once the spring weather arrives, the frog thaws out and hops back into action!

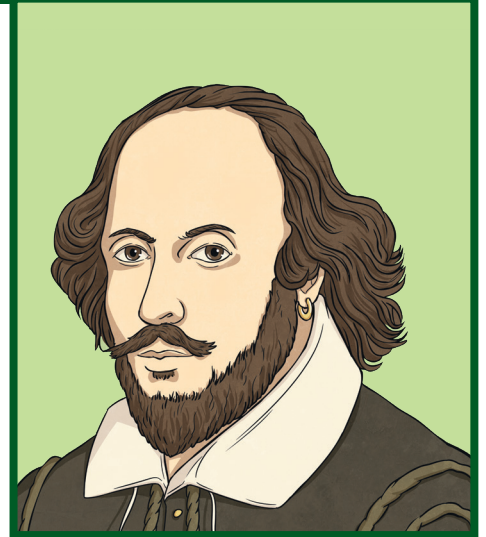
## The T.Rex's Closest Relative

For many years, scientists have speculated that dinosaurs and birds share many biological characteristics. However, recent research has identified that the nearest modern-day descendant to the famous, ferocious and carnivorous king of the dinosaurs is, in fact, a farmyard favourite: the chicken. Research has shown that the proteins found in the fossils of a Tyrannosaurus rex were identical to those of the chicken.



### Born Before Shakespeare?

Can you imagine being alive since before the time of King Henry VIII? A breed of shark swimming the depths of the North Atlantic Ocean has such an epic lifespan that some that are alive today may even have been born as long ago as the Tudor times. Scientists have always known that some species of shark have a long lifespan but, in 2007, a Greenland shark was found with an estimated age of up to 512 years. While it is not known exactly how old this particular shark was, this breed is known to typically live for at least 272 years and it is thought they do not reach maturity until they are 150 years old.



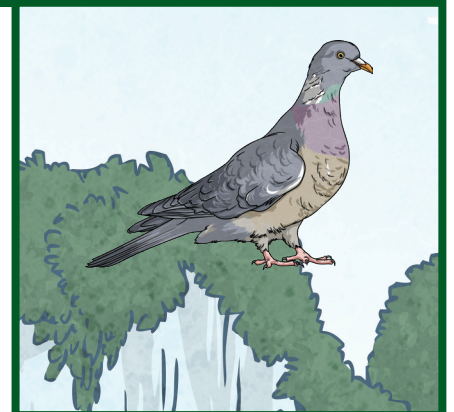
### Four Identical Offspring



The nine-banded armadillo — a small armoured mammal from North America — is the only vertebrate to routinely produce a litter of four identical quadruplets. Scientists are baffled by the phenomenon; it is not known exactly why they always birth the same number of young. Baby armadillos look similar to adults but with a softer exterior.

### Winged Mathematicians

Studies in the past have shown that some primates are capable of thinking mathematically. However, it has been proven that pigeons can do the same. While they won't quite be able to help you with your maths homework, pigeons have demonstrated the ability to recognise ordinal numbers. Following a year of training with scientists, pigeons demonstrated that they were able to sequence numbers of objects; they pecked at sets of objects in ascending order (1, 2, 3, etc.) in return for a reward.





### New Leg? Not a Problem!

Medicine has come a long way in recent years and a human being's capacity to heal is a wondrous thing. However, wouldn't it be amazing if we could regenerate body parts? One famous Mexican amphibian can do just that. The axolotl salamander, which is critically endangered and native to only one lake area in Mexico, can grow replacement limbs or even produce extra ones. Scientists are fascinated by this phenomenon and have conducted research in the hope of finding out more about this remarkable species.

### More Fascinating Facts:

- Baby elephants suck on their trunks for comfort.
- Tigers have striped skin, as well as striped fur; every tiger's markings are unique.
- Flamingos only eat with their heads upside down.
- All of the swans in England and Wales are owned by The Queen.
- Female lions carry out 90% of the hunting.
- There is a species of jellyfish that is, supposedly, immortal.

# Questions

1. At what age does a Greenland shark reach maturity? Tick one.

- 272 years old
- 150 years old
- 512 years old
- 18 years old

2. **...a human being's capacity to heal is a wondrous thing.**

Which word means the same as 'capacity'? Tick one.

- liquid
- recover
- ability
- medicine

3. Where does the Greenland shark live?

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4. Fill in the missing words.

This breed of salamander, which is critically \_\_\_\_\_ and native to one lake area, can grow \_\_\_\_\_ limbs or even produce extra ones.

5. Look at the first paragraph of the text.

Find and copy one phrase which contains an example of alliteration.

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6. How do you think that the scientists rewarded the pigeons for selecting the correct answer?

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7. **Female lions carry out 90% of the hunting.**

Why do you think that this is included as a 'fascinating fact'?

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8. **The axolotl, which is critically endangered and native to only one lake area in Mexico,**  
Explain why you think that the axolotl might be critically endangered.

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9. Do you think that there are any creatures that are able to freeze for several months of the year (like the wood frog) in the United Kingdom? Give a reason for your answer.

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10. What was the most interesting fact that you learnt from this text? Give a reason for your answer.

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# Answers

1. At what age does a Greenland shark reach maturity? Tick one.

- 272 years old
- 150 years old**
- 512 years old
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2. **...a human being's capacity to heal is a wondrous thing.**

Which word means the same as 'capacity'? Tick one.

- liquid
- recover
- ability**
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3. Where does the Greenland shark live?

**North Atlantic Ocean**

4. Fill in the missing words.

This breed of salamander, which is critically **endangered** and native to one lake area, can grow **replacement** limbs or even produce extra ones.

5. Look at the first paragraph of the text.

Find and copy one phrase which contains an example of alliteration.

**(the animal kingdom's most) bizarre and baffling phenomena.**

6. How do you think that the scientists rewarded the pigeons for selecting the correct answer?

**Pupils' own responses, such as: I imagine that the scientists rewarded the pigeons with some seeds or other small treats each time they got the correct answer.**

7. **Female lions carry out 90% of the hunting.**

Why do you think that this is included as a 'fascinating fact'?

**Pupils' own responses, such as: I think this may have been included as a 'fascinating fact' because most people might have assumed that it was the male lion that did most of the hunting. People may have thought that perhaps the male was more ferocious and the female's job was to help rear the young.**

8. **The axolotl, which is critically endangered and native to only one lake area in Mexico,...**  
Explain why you think the axolotl might be critically endangered.  
**Pupils' own responses, such as: The axolotl might be critically endangered because, if they live in only one lake area in Mexico, it is possible that their habitat might be threatened. If they only live in one area then they are more vulnerable to extinction.**
9. Do you think that there are any creatures that are able to freeze for several months of the year (like the wood frog) in the United Kingdom? Give a reason for your answer  
**Pupils' own responses, such as: I don't think that there are any creatures like the wood frog in the United Kingdom. This is because the climate in the United Kingdom is warmer than in North America so creatures would not need to adapt to these freezing conditions.**
10. What was the most interesting fact that you learnt from this text? Give a reason for your answer.  
**Pupils' own responses, such as: The most interesting fact that I learnt was that chickens are the nearest living ancestor to the T. Rex. This interested me because I would have thought that a large, carnivorous creature or a reptile (such as a crocodile) would have more in common with a T. Rex.**