

# Strange but True: Animals

Over the years, we humans have learnt a great deal about the animals with which we share our Earth. However, there are some creatures whose behaviours and characteristics can still astonish us. Read on to find out more about some of the animal kingdom's most bizarre and baffling species.

## Cuddly Criminals?

The koala — native to Australia — is a cute and fluffy mammal, known for its trademark tree-hugging pose. It may surprise you to know that these furry creatures have fingerprints that are almost identical to those of human beings. The koala's fingerprint is more similar to human fingerprints than those of chimpanzees. One scientist has even warned the Australian police to be aware of the similarity just in case they are ever confused at a crime scene!



## Frozen Alive



There is a unique breed of frog in North America that becomes frozen solid 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 claimed that birds are the closest living relation to dinosaurs. However, recent research has identified that the nearest modern-day descendant to the ferocious king of the dinosaurs is, in fact, a chicken. Scientists found that the fossils of a Tyrannosaurus rex contained substances which are identical to those found in the chicken.



## A Tudor Shark?

Can you imagine being alive since before the time of King Henry VIII? It is thought that a breed of shark swimming the depths of the North Atlantic Ocean may have been born as long ago as the Tudor times. 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, the breed is known to typically live for at least 272 years.



## Four Identical Offspring



The nine-banded armadillo from North America is the only **vertebrate** to consistently give birth to four identical **quadruplets**. Scientists are baffled by the phenomenon; it is not known exactly why they always have the same number of babies.

## Winged Mathematicians

Studies in the past have shown that **primates** are able to think mathematically. However, while they won't quite be able to help you with your maths homework, pigeons have shown that they can do the same. Scientists trained pigeons to sequence numbers of objects. They pecked at sets of objects in order (1, 2, 3, etc.) in return for a reward.

## New Leg? Not a Problem!

Wouldn't it be amazing if we could grow new body parts? One famous Mexican **amphibian** can do just that. This breed of salamander, a critically endangered species, can grow its own replacement limbs or even produce extra ones. Scientists are fascinated by this occurrence 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 can, supposedly, live forever.

### Glossary

**amphibian:** A cold-blooded vertebrate animal such as newts, toads and frogs. The young have gills but the adults breathe air.

**primates:** Mammals with hands, feet that are similar to hands and forward-facing eyes including lemurs, monkeys and apes.

**quadruplets:** Four babies that are born at one time.

**vertebrate:** Any animal with a backbone.

# Questions

1. How long does a wood frog freeze for each year? Tick one.

- seven months  
 six months  
 four months  
 eight months

2. Draw **four** lines and complete each sentence.

The fossils of a T. Rex...

was found with an estimated age of up to 512 years

The wood frog...

contain substances which are identical to those found in the chicken.

The koala...

has fingerprints that are almost identical to those of human beings.

A Greenland shark...

enters a frozen state every September.

3. Fill in the missing words.

The nine-banded \_\_\_\_\_ from North America is the only vertebrate to consistently give birth to four identical \_\_\_\_\_.

4. Look at the section called **Winged Mathematicians**.

Find and copy one word which means 'a particular order in which related things follow each other'.

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5. What percentage of hunting is carried out by female lions?

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6. **...a Greenland shark was found with an estimated age of up to 512 years.**

Explain why you think that the shark's age is described as 'estimated'.

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7. **Can you imagine being alive since before the time of King Henry VIII?**

Why do you think that the author has included this sentence in the text?

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8. Which creature from the text did you find the most interesting? Give a reason for your answer.

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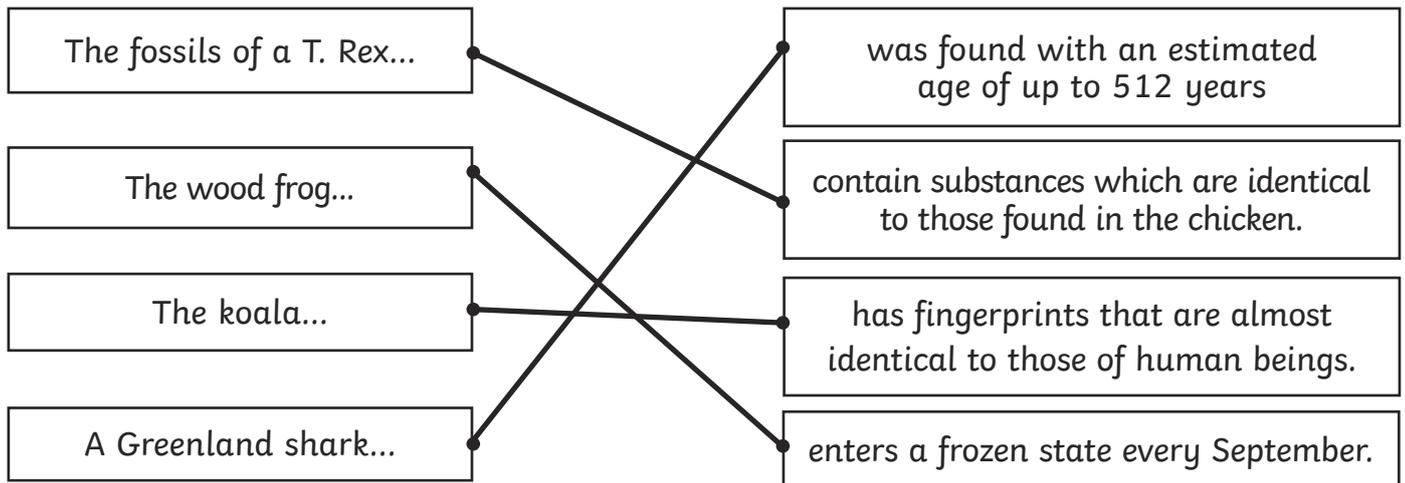
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# Answers

1. How long does a wood frog freeze for each year? Tick one.

- seven months**
- six months
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2. Draw **four** lines and complete each sentence.



3. Fill in the missing words.

The nine-banded **armadillo** from North America is the only vertebrate to consistently give birth to four identical **quadruplets**.

4. Look at the section called **Winged Mathematicians**.

Find and copy one word which means 'a particular order in which related things follow each other'.

**sequence**

5. What percentage of hunting is carried out by female lions?

**90%**

6. ...a Greenland shark was found with an estimated age of up to 512 years.

Explain why you think that the shark's age is described as 'estimated'.

**Pupils' own responses, such as: The shark's age is described as 'estimated' because they don't know exactly how old it is. They have probably used scientific methods to try and work out its age but they can't tell for certain.**

7. **Can you imagine being alive since before the time of King Henry VIII?**

Why do you think the author has included this sentence in the text?

**Pupils' own responses, such as: The author probably included this sentence to try and give the reader an idea of how long this particular Greenland shark might have been around for. The time of King Henry VIII was long ago so this emphasises how old the shark was.**

8. Which creature from the text did you find the most interesting? Give a reason for your answer.

**Pupils' own responses, such as: I found the wood frog the most interesting because I find it amazing that a creature can freeze and then come back into action. I didn't realise an animal's heart could stop for such a long time before beating again.**