

# BACK TALK

1. **Fill in** the thought balloon.
2. **Cut out** the entire picture (or make a photocopy of it).
3. **Mail** it along with your name, address, phone number, and date of birth to **Nat Geo Kids, Back Talk, P.O. Box 96000, Washington, DC 20090-6000**. Selection for publication in a future issue will be at the discretion of *Nat Geo Kids*.



## FROM THE MAY 2019 ISSUE

**First one to the grass wins!**

Hannah C., 6  
Eugene, Oregon

**This might take awhile.**

Austin Z., 11  
Middlebury, Indiana

**Traffic is slow today.**

Brendan K., 11  
Riverside, California

**The GPS says we'll be there in a couple of years.**

Ava R., 10  
Portland, Texas

**This is the 100-millimeter dash!**

Miyah G., 11  
Hershey, Pennsylvania

**Let's go to the slow-motion replay!**

Diesel B., 11  
Harrodsburg, Kentucky

**I'm snailing away.**

Allison J., 12  
Boulder, Colorado

**I'm gonna win! Eventually.**

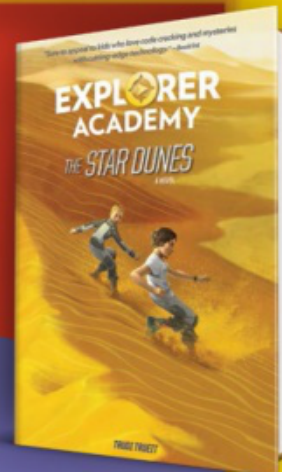
Seth V., 13  
Vancouver, Washington



 NATIONAL  
GEOGRAPHIC

**weird  
but  
true!**

**FUN  
GIVEAWAY**



**KIDS**



**WELCOME  
HOME,**

**Jaguars!**

**These spotted cats are on the move  
to find new land.**



**20**

**CUTE  
ANIMALS**



**NEW  
MOVIE:  
ONWARD**



**CRITTER  
CHAT**



**MOUNTAIN GORILLAS AND FIERCE BIG CATS. LUSH JUNGLES AND ENDLESS DESERTS** that may be hiding more than meets the eye. An adventurer's dream come true for the students aboard the Explorer Academy ship *Orion*.

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## 20 Journey of the Jaguar

These spotted cats are on the move to find new homes.

## 12 20 Cute Animals

You'll aw over these  
adorable critters.



## 18 New Movie: Onward

See how this flick stacks  
up to reality.



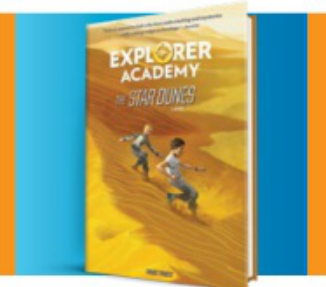
## 24 30 Cool Things About China

Get fantastic facts about  
this amazing country.



## 26 Sneak Peek!

Check out an excerpt  
from *Explorer Academy:  
The Star Dunes*.



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World Records

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Didn't Know!

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# weird but true!



About  
**A BILLION  
BACTERIA**  
could be in your  
mouth right now.



**MEN**  
get the  
**HICCUPS**  
more often  
than  
**WOMEN**  
do.

**Crocodiles**  
have been around  
for about  
**200  
MILLION  
YEARS.**



## Check out these outrageous facts.

BY MARILYN TERRELL



**CHECK OUT  
THE BOOK!**

### SMOOTH PEANUT BUTTER

is more popular on  
the East Coast of  
the United States;

### CHUNKY

rules on the West Coast.



Between  
**1912 and 1918,**  
you could take  
your **money** to  
**Washington, D.C.,**  
to be

**WASHED**  
and  
**IRONED.**



One of the world's **MOST EXPENSIVE TREE HOUSES,**  
located in Scotland, cost about **\$4 MILLION** to build.



Thomas  
Jefferson's  
recipe for  
**VANILLA  
ICE CREAM**

is in the  
Library of  
Congress.



Scientists  
believe that  
**SATURN'S  
RINGS**  
will eventually  
disappear.

Some fish  
can change from  
**FEMALE**  
to **MALE.**

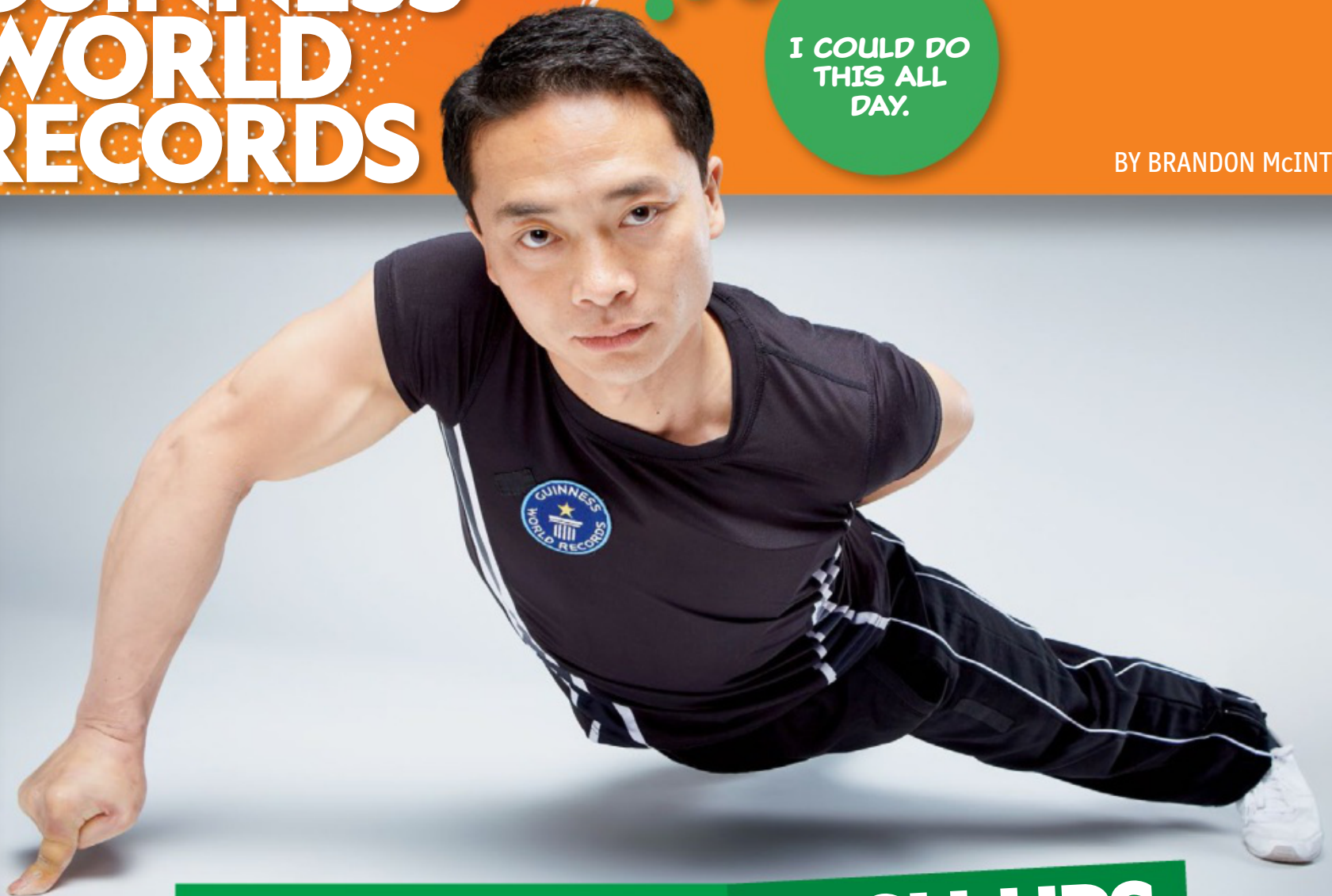


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# GUINNESS WORLD RECORDS

I COULD DO THIS ALL DAY.

BY BRANDON McINTYRE



## ONE-FINGER PUSH-UPS

**T**ackling 41 push-ups in 30 seconds is impressive. But doing 41 push-ups in 30 seconds on just one finger? That's mind-boggling. Xie Guizhong of Beijing, China, set the record for the most one-finger push-ups in 30 seconds. Xie also holds the record for the fastest time to push a car 165 feet with one digit. He's definitely got his fingers all over the record books.

## SUPER-HIGH SLIDE

**T**ired of taking the stairs? Take the slide instead! That's what visitors to the U.S. Bank Tower in Los Angeles, California, can do. At 918 feet aboveground, the Skyslide is the highest slide on the outside of a building, with its enclosed glass tube sending sliders from the 70th floor to the 69th. Call us when they add a teeter-totter to this sky-high playground.

THE SLIDE!



## SO MANY HORNS



THIS SHEEP HAS FOUR HORNS: TWO ON TOP OF ITS HEAD, PLUS ONE ON EACH SIDE.

**N**ot to toot its own horns, but the Jacob sheep—a domestic breed found in both the United States and the United Kingdom—has the most horns on an animal. Most of these sheep have four horns, but some have up to six. At least one pair typically grows vertically, often reaching more than two feet tall. So you might want to stay on this sheep's good side.

**Bet You  
Didn't  
Know!**

# 7 fortunate facts about luck

1

Only  
**1 in 10,000**  
clovers has  
**four** leaves.

2

**Pigs**  
are signs of  
**prosperity**  
and **good luck**  
in **China**.

3

Triskaidekaphobia  
is the fear of the  
**number 13**.

4

People  
in **Spain** eat  
**12 grapes** on  
**New Year's Eve**  
for **luck**.

5

In  
**Germany**,  
it's **good luck** to  
**touch** a  
chimney sweep's  
**brush**.

7

In **England**,  
a **bride finding a**  
**spider** in her  
**wedding dress** is  
considered **lucky**.

6

Several cultures  
believe that  
getting **pooped on**  
**by a bird** brings  
**good fortune**.



**CHECK  
OUT  
THE  
BOOK!**

# ALL ABOUT MONEY

BY KRISTIN BAIRD RATTINI AND C.M. TOMLIN

Ancient Greeks believed that **placing a coin in a dead person's mouth** would pay for the ferry ride to the afterlife.



A Chinese emperor had **his own calligraphy engraved on many of the coins** minted during his reign.



A stack of currency one mile high would contain more than 14 million bills.



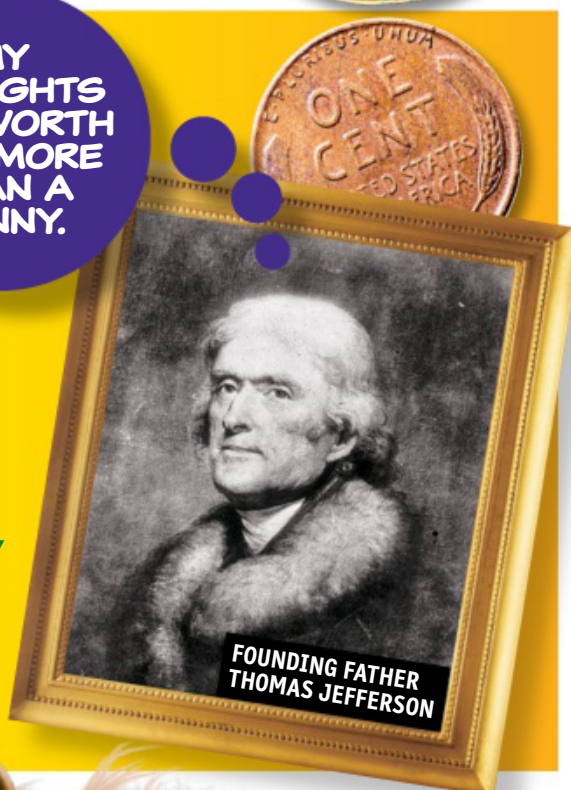
One tribe in what's now the Democratic Republic of the Congo used strips of a fabric called raffia as currency until the 1950s.



In 2018, travelers left **\$960,105 in loose change** at security checkpoints in U.S. airports.

MY THOUGHTS ARE WORTH WAY MORE THAN A PENNY.

The U.S. Founding Fathers **objected to the one-cent coin being called a penny** because that was also the name of a British coin.



Legend has it that **Martha Washington** donated her **silverware** to make the country's first coins.



More than **\$5 trillion in Monopoly money** has been printed since 1935.



Until 1816, **horses, oxen, and people** powered the machines that made coins at the U.S. Mint.

## MONEY TIP!

SAVING FOR SOMETHING COOL? ON A CALENDAR, **WRITE THE AMOUNT YOU'LL SAVE EACH WEEK** SO YOU KNOW EXACTLY WHEN YOU CAN BUY THE ITEM. **MARK THAT DATE WITH A GIANT STAR.**



GEORGIO KOLLIDAS / ALAMY (GREEK COIN); © THE TRUSTEES OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM (RAFFIA, CHINESE COIN); PHOTODISC / SUPERSTOCK (BILL STACK); CAROLYN FRANKS / SHUTTERSTOCK (LOOSE CHANGE); RSOOLL / DREAMTIME (PENNY); MPI / STRINGER / GETTY IMAGES (THOMAS JEFFERSON); WINTERLING / DREAMTIME (ART FRAME); IMAGE DIGITALLY COMPOSED; WAMA\_MIA / SHUTTERSTOCK (SILVERWARE); CCAT82 / SHUTTERSTOCK (LINEN TABLECLOTH); IMAGE DIGITALLY COMPOSED; JOE PEPLER / REX USA / SHUTTERSTOCK (MONOPOLY MONEY); CAROL WALKER / NATURE PICTURE LIBRARY (HORSE); KELLEY MILLER / NG STAFF (PIGGY BANK)



1

## NIGHT LIGHTS

Boca Ciega Bay in St. Petersburg, Florida, comes alive with lighted boats during a floating celebration of the winter holidays. Participants in the annual St. Pete Beach holiday boat parade also donate toys to kids in need. Sounds like a perfect parade!

# Festive Parades

THESE SUPER SPECTACLES WILL  
PUT YOU IN A PARTY MOOD.



2

## FLOWER POWER

For more than a century, fantastic flower-covered floats and marching bands have dazzled crowds at the annual Rose Parade on New Year's Day. Not a fan of flowers? Stick around for a college football game that follows the parade.



CHECK  
OUT  
THE  
BOOK!

4

## COLORFUL RITUAL

Millions of people of the Hindu faith come together to take a ritual dip in one of four sacred rivers in India as part of the Kumbh Mela festival. The religious procession can include elephants and camels, and festival organizers often provide music and dance performances.



3

## BLAZING BOAT

The Up Helly Aa festival in Lerwick, Scotland, ends every January in a blaze. Harking back to a Viking ritual, hundreds of torch-bearers march through the town's streets before setting a 30-foot-long galley—a type of ship—on fire.



5

## BALLOON BONANZA

More than three million people lined the streets of New York City to watch the debut of this Hello Kitty balloon in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. The parade has been held on the morning of Thanksgiving almost every year since 1924.



6

## DANCE PARTY

With elaborate headdresses and costumes, dancers perform the samba, an Afro-Brazilian group dance, in front of a crowd at the Carnival parade in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Carnival, a festival of merry-making and feasting, allows people to let loose after a couple months of winter.



7

## FLOATING FESTIVAL

People in Venice, Italy, take their parades to the water. That's because this city is built in a lagoon with canals for streets. Revelers float down the Grand Canal in decorated gondolas and other boats, like this giant mouse gondola, during the annual Carnival festival.



8

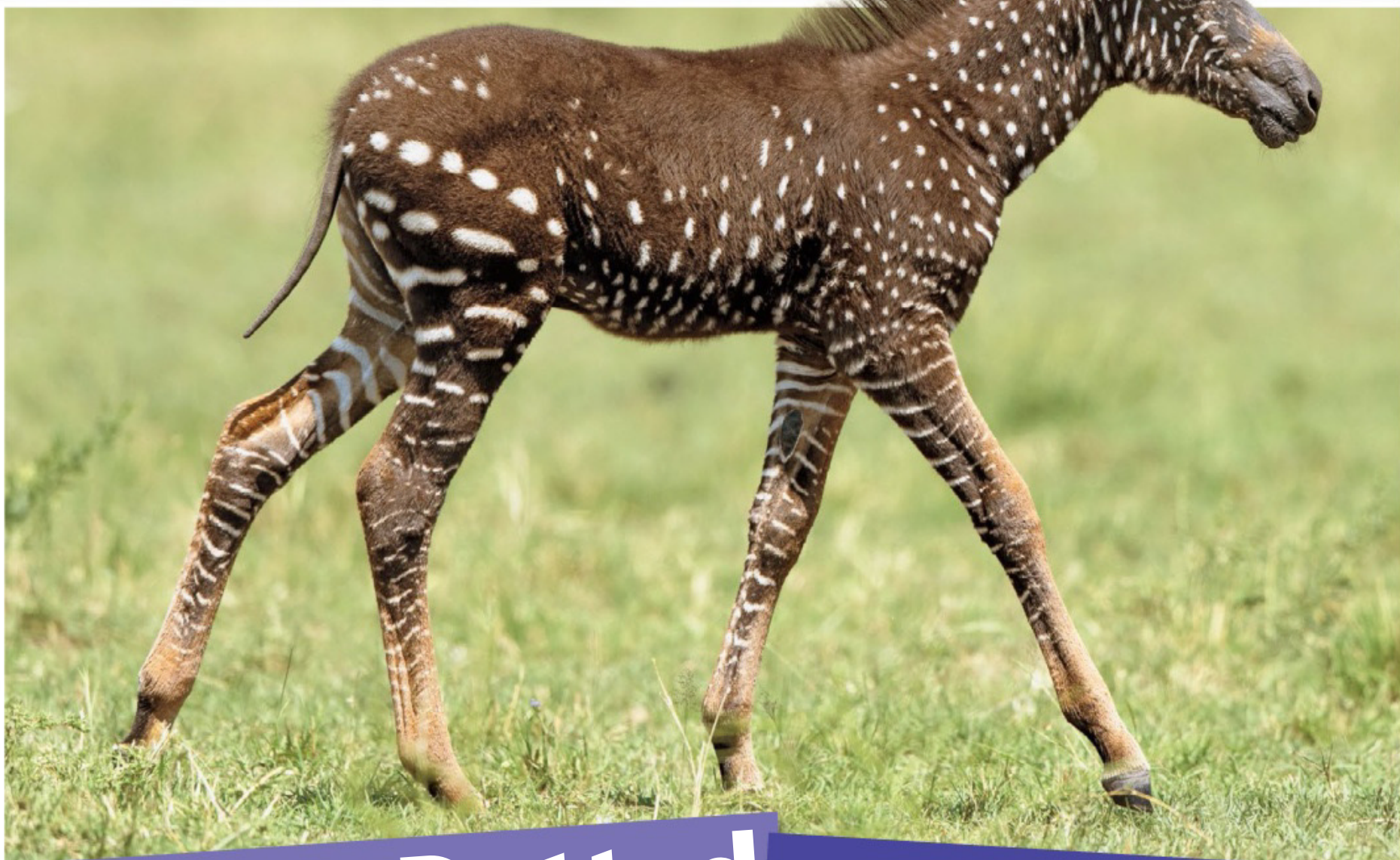
## CLOWN REVELRY

Giant jesters parade through the streets of the historic French Quarter in New Orleans, Louisiana. During the annual Mardi Gras celebration, nearly a hundred krewes—or festive groups—toss goodies including toys, stuffed animals, and Mardi Gras beads to the people who come to watch.



# AMAZING ANIMALS

I LOVE MY LOOK.



## Polka-Dotted

## Zebra!

LET'S PLAY A GAME: STRIPES VERSUS SPOTS!



TIRA THE POLKA-DOTTED ZEBRA WALKS WITH HER MOM.

### Masai Mara, Kenya

This zebra is easy to spot: The foal's dark coat is covered in white polka dots! "At first it looked like a different species altogether," photographer Frank Liu says.

The odd pattern is caused by a rare condition called pseudomelanism (pronounced soo-DOH-mel-uh-nih-zum). This means that the cells that create the red, yellow, brown, or black pigment in the mammal's hair and skin aren't working like they do in most animals. So instead of the colors running together to form stripes, they form dots.

The condition doesn't hurt the foal, now named Tira after the tour guide who first spotted her. But bugs might bite her more than the other zebras because scientists think that biting flies don't like landing on striped surfaces. Plus her speckled pattern makes her stand out from the herd, which could make her a target for predators like lions.

But the other zebras don't seem to mind Tira's funky coat—they probably think she's spot-on.

—Katie Stacey

CHECK OUT  
MY FANCY  
FOOTWORK.

# Cat Gets Bionic Feet



## Surrey, England

When Oscar the cat lost his back feet in an accident, his owners worried that he wouldn't make it because cats need their back feet for survival. But veterinarian Noel Fitzpatrick had an idea.

Fitzpatrick and a team of engineers created the first ever realistic prosthetic cat feet for Oscar. The new feet were based on the way antlers grow from a deer's head. The cat's skin and bones could grow into the prosthetics so they'd become part of his body.

Rods were fused into Oscar's leg bones, then special curved "feet" were attached. (Cats rock on their feet to move themselves forward.) Finally, Fitzpatrick attached tire-like rubber to the bottom of each foot so Oscar wouldn't slip.

Today Oscar does anything that four-footed cats do, including jumping onto beds, crawling up curtains, and even scratching his ears with his plastic feet. Mice, beware: Oscar is on the prowl!

—Jamie Kiffel-Alchek

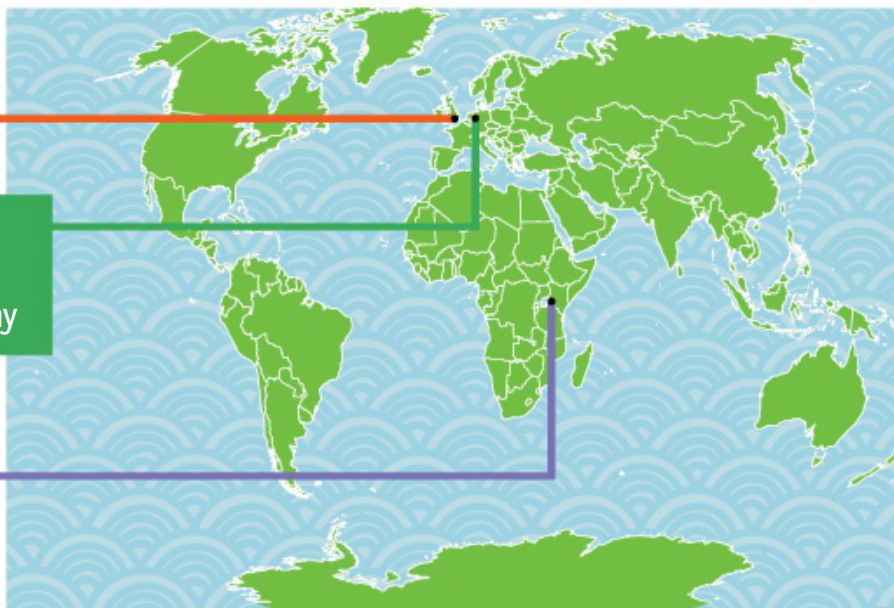


NEW FEET!

**CAT**  
Surrey,  
England

**DOG AND  
PIGLET**  
Hörstel, Germany

**ZEBRA**  
Masai Mara,  
Kenya



ADORABLE  
ANIMAL  
ALERT!



# Dog Protects Piglet

## Hörstel, Germany

Roland Adam wasn't sure what to do when he found an orphaned newborn Vietnamese potbellied pig alone and shivering on his farm. But Katjinga the Rhodesian ridgeback did. She snuggled up to the pint-size pig (now called Paulinchen), cleaning the pig with her tongue and nursing her as she would her own puppy. "Katjinga lay down, fed her, and kept her warm," Adam says. In fact, this isn't the first time Katjinga cuddled up with orphaned animals: She's also tended rabbits and ducks. "We even found her warming up one of our sheep that was sick," Adam says. Sounds like Katjinga was one protective pooch!

—Sarah Wassner Flynn



# 200 Cute Animals

BY JEN RINI

## HARP SEAL

If you're ever in snowy Arctic Russia or Canada, be sure to walk carefully—you might mistake a newborn harp seal for a pile of snow! At about two weeks old, the pup sheds its furry white coat for one that's gray and smooth, perfect for skimming through the ocean to hunt for small fish. When hunting, harp seals can hold their breath for up to 20 minutes while they dive to depths of 800 feet or more. That's almost as deep as the Eiffel Tower is tall.

## DEER

Deer often sniff to identify each other or just to say hello. And by now these fawns may need a friendly face—they've spent their first few weeks almost completely hidden, their spotted coats blending in with their forest homes. After three or four months, the spots fade and the brown coat grows thick for the winter.





## BEARS

In the fall, brown bear cubs will start packing on about three pounds a day to prepare for their deep winter sleep. Those pounds of fat are what the bears will live on while snoozing. Luckily, Mom is an expert at sniffing out meals in their northwestern United States habitat and can detect food from 18 miles away.



## RACCOON

This young raccoon might be an expert climber—many raccoons spend their first few months living in a nest in a tree hole. As adults, raccoons rely more on their sense of touch than their senses of sight and smell to find meals such as frogs, bird eggs, insects, and even snakes.



## ORANGUTAN

This baby orangutan may have figured out the best part of life in the trees: just hanging out! Orangutans spend up to 95 percent of their time high up in trees on the Indonesian islands of Borneo and Sumatra. They sleep, eat, and play in nests that are big enough for a 10-year-old kid to stretch out in.



## HEDGEHOG

This European hedgehog may look cute, but getting too close would be a problem. About 7,000 spiky quills cover its body. When they're attacked by predators such as owls, hedgehogs curl up into prickly balls—*ouch!*—that are nearly impossible to budge. Badgers are one of the few predators strong enough to pry open a hedgehog.



## CHEETAH

Under the shield of tall African grass, a cheetah cub is hidden from hungry lions and hyenas. The cub's long, fuzzy coat, called a mantle, camouflages it from danger. As the animal grows, the mantle gets smaller, but the cub will keep its mane until it's about two years old.

## WALLABY

Uh-oh ... better watch out or this cute wallaby might mob you! But that just means you'll be meeting its family. Wallabies and their young, called joeys, live in groups called mobs. These cute-looking creatures are no pushovers, though. Males will box each other over a mate. Plus they can survive for long periods of time without water in the dry Australian climate, gathering moisture from plants.



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## WILD BOARS

You wouldn't want to mess with these little guys after they're about a year old. That's when wild boars start growing permanent tusks. They use them to scratch trees (wild boar code for "This is my space") and defend themselves from predators or other boars. Like their pig cousins, wild boars are thought to be supersmart and communicate with a complex set of grunts and squeals.



## SEA TURTLE

This baby loggerhead sea turtle is a true survivor. First it broke out of an egg the size of a Ping-Pong ball. Then it dug itself out from a buried nest on a beach. After that, it scurried from the beach to the ocean, dodging predators such as crabs and herons. (You try doing that with flippers instead of feet!) And still no sigh of relief—once it reached the surf, the turtle swam for 24 hours straight to move farther out to sea, where it will have an easier time avoiding predators.

## GIANT PANDA

You *could* say a giant panda's stomach is a bottomless bamboo pit. Pandas chomp on bamboo plants up to 14 hours a day, moving only to search for more bamboo in China's forests. They've even developed a "false thumb"—an enlarged wrist bone that helps them grip the plants. All that eating doesn't leave much time for rest—they sleep for only two to four hours at a time.

Which cute baby animal are you?  
Take our personality quiz to find out.  
[natgeokids.com/march](https://www.natgeokids.com/march)





## COYOTES

A howl from a coyote pup may sound more like a high-pitched squeal, but hearing howls from the entire pack can sound a little spooky. Don't worry—they're mostly just checking on their pals. Coyotes use certain types of vocalizations to communicate in different situations. One type of howl rallies the pack for a hunt. Another helps a lost coyote find its friends. No wonder coyotes are often portrayed as extremely brainy in Native American folklore.



## BOBCAT

This bobcat may have one of the finest fur coats in the animal world, but it's not for show. The spotted fur helps North America's most common wild cat blend in with many habitats, from swamps to deserts to mountains. Those ear tufts? Bobcats may twitch them to communicate with other bobcats.

WATCH A VIDEO TO SEE BOBCAT BABIES PLAYING.  
[natgeokids.com/march](http://natgeokids.com/march)



## ERMINE

Hares, beware! This critter could be your enemy. Silent and sneaky, the foot-long ermine can pounce on prey that's larger than it is, such as an arctic hare. The stealthy stalker gets help from its changing coat, which is white during winter and brown in spring and summer—perfect for blending in with its surroundings.

## OWL

Hear the sound of a saw being sharpened on a stone? If you're in the woods of the western and northeastern United States or Canada, it could be the alarm call of a saw-whet owl. This bird may be small, but the seven- to eight-inch-tall owl is a swift and fierce night hunter, swooping down on unsuspecting mice, chipmunks, and squirrels under the cover of darkness.



# Cute Barnyard Animals!



## PIG

This little guy may not look so cute once he finds himself a mud hole. Pigs love to wallow in mud—it's like natural air-conditioning. They can't sweat, so rolling around in a giant mud bath is like blasting a fan on their bodies. The mud also acts as a natural sunscreen.

## DONKEY

This type of miniature donkey once lived in wild herds on the Italian islands of Sicily and Sardinia. Today they are mostly kept as pets and have friendly reputations.



## LAMBS

The wool from these adorable lambs is used to make carpets, but wool from other kinds of sheep is often used to make clothing. Depending on the breed, one sheep can produce enough wool each year for about 10 sweaters. They keep you warm *and* warm your heart.



## DUCK

A duckling is a true copycat. When ducklings hatch, they mimic their mother's every action, from eating to swimming to waddling. (The mimicking behavior is called imprinting.) But they don't copy Mom's look. Ducklings' yellow fuzz won't be replaced with adult feathers till they're about two months old.

## CALF

This calf may help its buddies take over the world! About one billion cows live on Earth—that's three times as many cows as people in the United States. In fact, cows outnumber people in some U.S. states, including Oklahoma and Idaho.



# THE TRUTH BEHIND THE NEW MOVIE

# Onward

BY JOHNNA RIZZO

In the new movie *Onward*, New Mushroomton is full of mythical creatures who've lost their magic mojo. Mermaids don't swim, and sprites ride motorcycles instead of fly. But elf brothers Barley and Ian Lightfoot want to find the old-world magic. *Nat Geo Kids* goes behind the scenes to see how Mushroomton's residents measure up against the creatures that real-world humans once believed in.

## ORIGIN STORY

A mythical creature often appears in stories from many different cultures all over the world—but that myth started somewhere! Check out some of the real places where these fantasy figures likely first showed up.



### ELVES

Norse territory (modern-day Denmark, Norway, and Sweden)



### CENTAURS

Greece



### MANTICORES

Persia (modern-day Iran)



### UNICORNS

India and China

## Unicorns



Unicorns are the pesky city raccoons of New Mushroomton, using their horns to flip lids off garbage cans to grab a meal. In the real world, people thought that the mythical unicorn had powerful, magical horns that could even stop poisons. Royalty would stir the "horns" into food or drinks, or grind them up as medicine to keep toxins from taking effect. (Of course, it didn't work. And the "horns" were likely from rhinos or narwhals.)

## Colt Bronco

Colt Bronco, the boyfriend of Barley and Ian's mom, is a centaur who's also a police officer. He's a stickler for rules, and even lectures Barley after he stages a protest to prevent an old-world fountain from being torn down. But in real-world mythology, centaurs could get wild—*really* wild. The Greek half-men, half-horses were said to throw crazy parties in the woods and preferred using giant rocks and huge tree branches in battle. One exception was the calm and wise centaur Chiron, who legend says taught ancient Greek heroes like Hercules and Achilles.



## Ian Lightfoot

When awkward teenager Ian wants to invite kids from school to his 16th birthday party, the elf writes words on his hands so he won't forget them. But he's so nervous and sweaty, he ends up clumsily smearing ink on his face! Unlike Ian, elves from real mythology were thought to be graceful. In fact, legend says that when elves danced among toadstools in misty fields, people who watched them were so entranced that several years would pass—even though they thought it had been only a few hours!

## Manticore


The first thing Barley and Ian search for in their quest is a map that will lead them to a magic gem they need for a spell. That takes them to Manticore, a thousand-year-old part-human, part-lion, part-scorpion, part-bat warrior. She might sound scary, but this manticore now runs a family restaurant complete with a kids' menu—which looks just like the map the brothers need. Real-world mythological manticores were said to be a bit more monstrous. In the fifth century B.C., a Greek physician named Ctesias (pronounced TEE-zee-us) supposedly described manticores as having three rows of shark-like teeth and the ability to shoot venomous spines forward and backward, depending on the arc of its scorpion tail.



## Barley Lightfoot

Big brother Barley is loud, mostly because he drives a van named Guinevere that backfires, rumbles, and honks. Real-world mythological elves were said to be pretty rowdy too—but not because of noisiness. These naughty creatures were thought to cause knots in hair, rashes, and even nightmares by sitting on a sleeping person's chest. In fact, the German word for “nightmare” is *Alpdruck* (pronounced ahlp-drook), which translates to “elf pressure.”





A jaguar's eyesight is nearly twice as powerful at night to help them stalk prey in the dark.

# Journey of the JAGUAR

These spotted cats are on the move to find new homes.

BY JAMIE KIFFEL-ALCHEH



**A JAGUAR SWIMS  
ACROSS THE  
PARAGUAY RIVER  
IN BRAZIL.**

**A** young jaguar swims across a muddy river, his spotted coat barely visible above the water. The wild cat's eyes focus on a tasty crocodile sunning itself on a nearby bank. Suddenly the jaguar springs and latches on to the reptile with one bite. The big lunch will give the cat fuel for the journey he's about to begin: searching for a mate.

But the route the jaguar needs to travel is a dangerous one, taking the cat away from the dense jungle and out into open land, closer to humans. To help jaguars safely make this journey, scientists have come up with a plan. Their bold idea? A network of linked

territories running through 18 countries and two continents. The goal is to stop jaguar numbers from declining—and protect the cats' massive range, which is nearly four million square miles.

## SHRINKING HABITAT

North and South America's biggest cat once prowled, climbed, and swam through more than seven million square miles stretching from the southwestern United States, through Mexico and Central America, and well into Argentina. But in the past century, things like cattle ranching and the growth of cities have cut this territory in half. Few jaguars have been seen in the United States, and the southern

range now barely extends into Argentina. "Because of development by humans, populations of the cats have been cut off from each other," says John Polisar, jaguar conservation program coordinator for the Wildlife Conservation Society. The separation of these scattered pockets of jaguars means fewer mates will meet—and fewer cubs will be born each year.

## BIG-CAT HIGHWAY

Scientists once assumed protecting these pockets of land that jaguars settled in—called Jaguar Conservation Units—was the key to helping the species survive. But sometimes young males trek up to a hundred miles to find a mate, traveling from pocket to pocket on a kind of jaguar superhighway made up of stretches of land called corridors.

Protecting the larger pockets of land where jaguars live is important. But so is making sure that they can safely travel on these corridors—which can be as narrow as a line of trees along a fence or nearly as big as Yosemite National Park.

Over the years, humans have cleared much of the rainforest on these connecting corridors to build new towns and farms. Without trees, shrubs, and grass to hide in, jaguars are less likely to use the corridors to travel from pocket to pocket—and the ones that do are putting themselves in danger. Fewer

AR



jaguars using the corridors means fewer mates meeting. That has led to a decline in the jaguar population. As of 2015, these big cats were already extinct in El Salvador and Uruguay.

Wildlife ecologist Alan Rabinowitz realized that preserving these corridors was a way to keep jaguars from becoming cut off from each other. So working alongside multiple governments, environmental agencies, and local communities, Rabinowitz launched the Jaguar Corridor Initiative (JCI) to protect the super-highway that the jaguars were using—and therefore their entire range.

## MAKING CONNECTIONS

Launched over 10 years ago, the JCI sent scientists to visit 14 countries inhabited by jaguars to pinpoint exactly where they lived. “We also needed to identify which corridors the animals used most,” says Roberto Salom, Costa Rica’s program director for Panthera, an organization that works to protect wild cats. “By focusing on the most threatened areas—such as Nicaragua, where forests were

being cut down at a high rate—we figured out which countries to focus on first.” By 2015, many local communities had put protections in place along the various corridors.

## HOME ON THE RANCH

The jaguar slinks out of the dense Amazon rainforest not far from a pasture of cattle. In the past, the jaguar might have tried to eat the easy prey, which would make it a target for ranchers protecting their herd. But these cattle are safely fenced in, and

the jaguar moves on without an attack.

Thanks to encouragement from the Wildlife Conservation Society, Panthera, and other organizations, ranchers from more than half of the jaguar’s 18 range countries agreed to follow guidelines to keep the cats safe. One of those guidelines is keeping certain livestock fenced in at night so they don’t wander off and tempt the cats with an easy meal. “If a jaguar can’t see the livestock, it’s not likely to hunt it,” Salom says.

Other guidelines include placing flashing



A JAGUAR STALKS PREY IN BRAZIL'S CUIABÁ RIVER.



**Jaguar Conservation Units:** Protected areas of land where jaguars can live and safely raise cubs.



**Jaguar Corridors:** Stretches of land that connect one Jaguar Conservation Unit to another. Jaguars travel on these corridors to get to protected land.



JAK WONDERLY / NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC IMAGE COLLECTION (STALKING JAGUAR); NICK GARBUZZI / NPL / MINDEN PICTURES (JAGUAR PROFILE); KRIS WIKTOR / SHUTTERSTOCK (CUBS AND MOM); PETE OXFORD / MINDEN PICTURES (SPIDER MONKEYS); MARTIN WALZ (MAP)

TAKE A FUN BIG CATS QUIZ.  
[natgeokids.com/march](https://natgeokids.com/march)





A jaguar's spots are called rosettes because they're shaped like roses.

lights close to livestock enclosures to scare the cats into staying closer to the property's edge. "Jaguars are part of scientists' *and* ranchers' shared culture out here," Polisar says. "Ranchers want to work with us, which has made a very big difference."


### SAFE PASSAGE

The young male jaguar's journey is almost over. He's safely made it across farmland and past dozens of villages. In the distance, he spots the edge of an unfamiliar

rainforest. He dashes past cattle—all fenced in—and doesn't stop until he reaches the trees.

The cat smells something new. A pair of eyes peer out at him. He tenses, ready to claim the territory from another male. But it's a female. At last, thanks to the JCI's efforts, this pair of potential mates is about to meet.

"The jaguar is an incredibly adaptable species," says Diana Friedeberg, Mexico's Panthera program director. "But they still need our help to survive."



Jaguar moms typically give birth to two to four cubs at a time.

## Forest On Fire

**S**outh America's Amazon rainforest is home to about one in 10 of all species on Earth—including jaguars. But in 2019, some 200,000 fires burned there, the highest number since 2010 and more than an 80 percent increase from 2018.

What caused these fires? People. Mostly set on purpose by loggers, cattle ranchers, and farmers trying to clear land, several of the fires could even be seen from space.

If the forests continue to burn at this rate, animals that survive will eventually have to adapt to a new way of life. For example, a jaguar's fur camouflages it among the forest trees. If too many trees burn, the cat will need to find another way to hide. Spider monkeys that eat fruit from the treetops will need to develop a different diet. And since much of the rainforest hasn't been fully explored, species we didn't know existed might have already disappeared from the planet forever.

"It's not too late to save rainforest animals," says the Wildlife Conservation Society's Carlos César Durigan. "Recent fires have put a spotlight on the problem and encouraged people to take action. But we have to keep taking action."



A WHITE-BELLIED SPIDER MONKEY CLIMBS TREES IN THE AMAZON RAINFOREST IN ECUADOR.

**YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE!** Check out what small things you can do that will have a big impact for jaguars. [natgeokids.com/march](https://natgeokids.com/march)



**1** The new movie **Mulan** is based on a sixth-century Chinese poem called "**The Ballad of Mulan.**" In both the poem and the movie, the character **Hua Mulan** disguises herself as a man **to take her sick father's place in the army.**

**2** In **China**, every year is represented by one of **12 animals.** **2020** is the **year of the rat.**

**3** China's **Bailong Elevator** carries visitors more than **a thousand feet** up a cliff's edge.

**4** You can buy **green-bean-flavored ice pops** in this country.

**5** In ancient China, **soldiers sometimes wore armor made from paper.**

**6** In 2010, a **2,400-year-old pot of soup** was unearthed in **Xian, China.**

# 30 COOL THINGS ABOUT

BY ALICIA KLEPEIS



**7** Found in northern China, **long-eared jerboas** have ears that are **one-third longer than their heads.**

**8** People race boats with **dragon designs** at a Chinese festival **in the spring.**

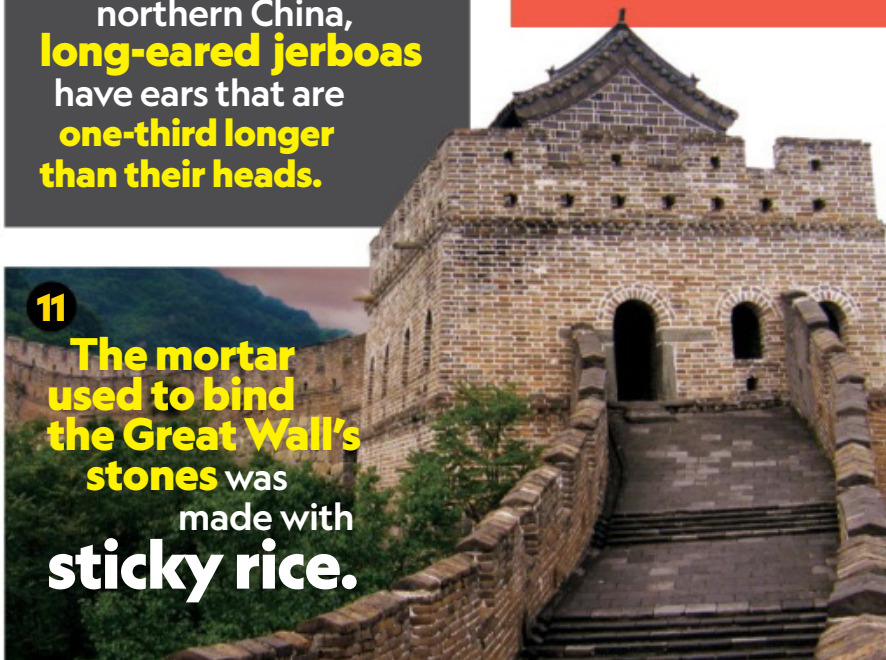


**9** **Chinese monal birds** sometimes build nests in caves.

**10** Put together, all of China's railway lines could **loop around Earth twice.**



**14** **Asiatic golden cats** in South China sometimes **communicate by spitting.**



**11** The mortar used to bind the **Great Wall's stones** was made with **sticky rice.**

**12** Half of all pigs on Earth **live in China.**

**13** Temperatures in **China's Turpan Depression** can range from **120°F in summer** to **minus 20°F in winter.**

**15** Developed about 5,000 years ago, the earliest **chopsticks** were used for cooking, not eating.



**16** Chinese white dolphins, which live off of southern China, are often pink.



**17** China is close to the size of the continental



United States but has only one official time zone.

**18** China's Yunnan snub-nosed monkeys live at a **higher altitude** than any other primate except humans.



**19** People speak Mandarin, a Chinese dialect, as their first language more than any other language in the world.

**20**



The Forbidden City, a palace complex in Beijing, contains about 9,000 rooms.

**21** China is home to a cluster of **ancient rock pillars** called the **Stone Forest**.



# CHINA



**22** No one knows if **Mulan** was a real person. If she was, she likely would've been a warrior during China's Northern Wei dynasty, which lasted from A.D. 386 to 535.

**23** China's **Grand Buddha**, a giant stone statue, has **18-foot-long eyebrows**.

**24** Chinese ice-cream trucks **can play music only when parked**.

**25** Giant pandas are good swimmers.



**26** Chinese brides **often wear red**, a color considered to be lucky.

**29** The word "**ketchup**" may come from a Chinese word for **pickled-fish sauce**.

**30** The city of Xinxiang in **northeastern China** has an **iron statue of Mulan** being welcomed home from war.

**27** Many **Chinese emperors** thought themselves to be **descendants of dragons**.

**28** It took around **37 YEARS** to make the **TERRA-COTTA ARMY**, a set of more than **7,000 clay soldiers** built to guard an emperor's tomb.



GET MORE MOVIE SCOOP!  
Go online to watch a trailer and check out photos from *Mulan*.  
[natgeokids.com/march](https://www.natgeokids.com/march)

FROM  
THE  
PAGES  
OF

## EXPLORER ACADEMY

# THE STAR DUNES

BY TRUDI TRUEIT

In this excerpt from *Explorer Academy: The Star Dunes*, Cruz and his classmate Dugan are exploring the Namib Desert, a coastal desert in southern Africa, when they suddenly find themselves being chased ...

**U**h ... Cruz?" Dugan cleared his throat. "I think somebody's coming. Make that a couple of somebodies." Cruz's neck snapped up. Two people, wearing scarves to cover their faces, dark shirts, and jeans, were sprinting toward him and Dugan.

"Let's get out of here."

"Which way?" Dugan's head was ping-ponging. "Up!"

He didn't need to repeat himself. Dugan took off, racing for the closest sand dune—the one known as Big Daddy.

Cruz wasn't far behind. The boys did their best to scramble up a ridge, but running on a surface that was constantly shifting wasn't easy. For every three feet Cruz ran, he slid back one foot. Thirty feet up the ridge and he was out of breath.

"Hurry!" Dugan shouted over his shoulder.

"They're gaining on us."

"I'm trying ..." said Cruz, feeling himself slip once again.

"Lean forward," called Dugan. "Use your hands."

Cruz put his left hand in Dugan's left footprint, then his right hand in Dugan's right footprint. Climbing like a monkey did give him some stability, but still, he wasn't going nearly fast enough. Their pursuers were quickly closing the distance.

Cruz felt a jerk. Someone had a hold of his pack now. He tried to pull away but couldn't. He was stuck, pedaling in place at the top of the dune. Cruz had no choice but to let the pack fall from his shoulder.

Suddenly, his feet were out from under him. He was on his stomach and being dragged backward. Cruz was choking on sand. He tried to spit it out, even as he struggled to break free of his captor.

"Tuck and roll," yelled Dugan.

"Huh?"

"ROLL!"

Cruz closed his fist around the sand. Flipping

onto his right shoulder, Cruz closed his eyes and tossed the sand into the air. A man began to cough. Cruz felt his grip loosen.

Twisting free, Cruz tucked his head and legs in and hurtled his body down the dune, toward the base of the dune where he and Dugan had left the car they arrived in. He felt like a human beach ball, bouncing over the sand. Cruz had no idea how long it took him to tumble to the bottom. It felt like ages but was probably only a few minutes.

Once Cruz could tell sky from sand, he clumsily sprang to his feet. The men in black were charging down the dune on their feet. Being upright was slowing them down. Dugan was rolling to a stop about 20 feet away.

Cruz ran to him, pulled him up, and they raced down the trail and across the scrublands toward their vehicle. Once there, the two explorers jumped inside the car.

"Auto Auto, on!" Cruz cried, addressing their self-driving smart car. "Lock all the doors ... return to Egumbo Guest House, now!" huffed Cruz, lowering his head for biometric identification. "And please ... hurry."

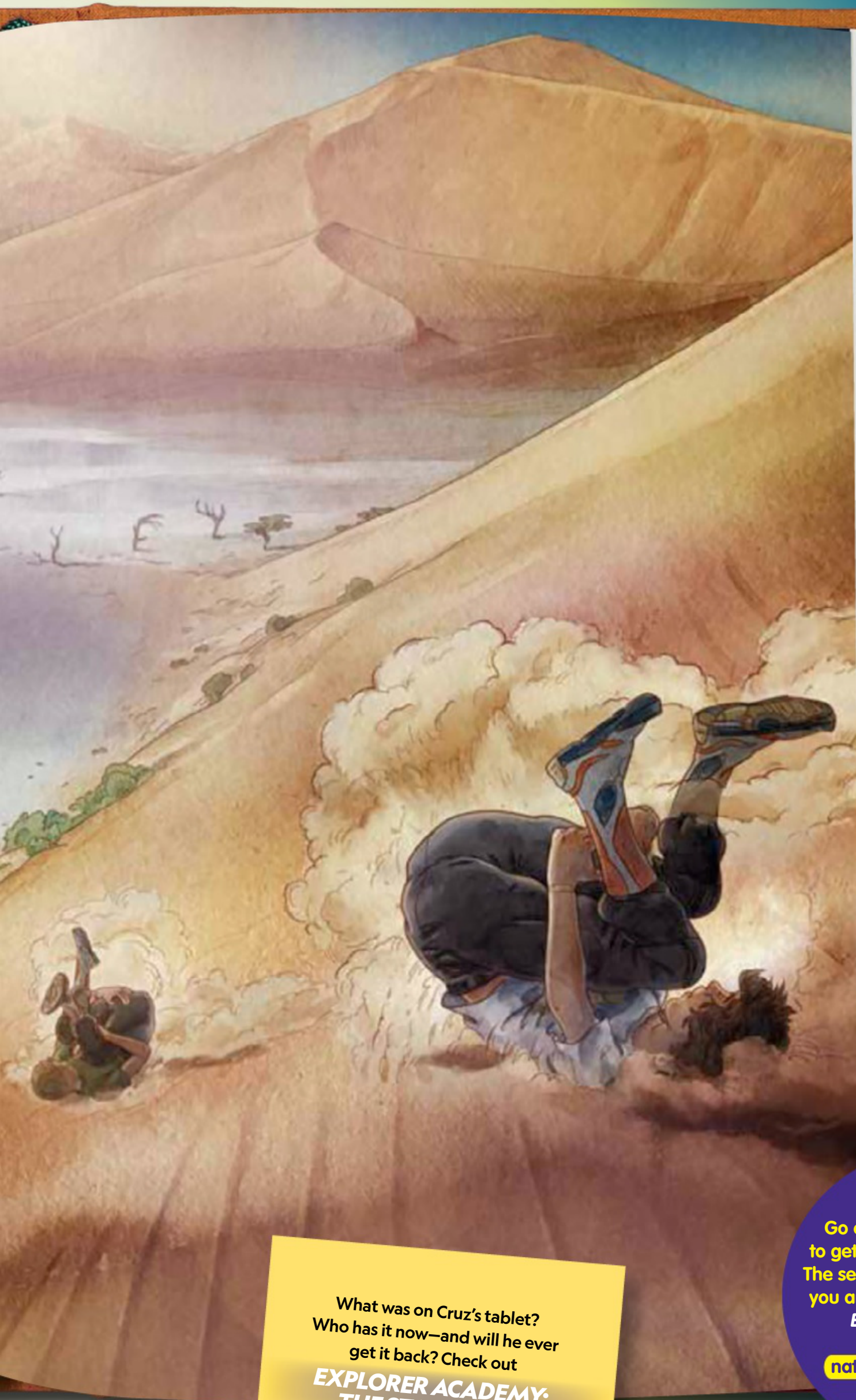
"They're coming!" cried Dugan. "Go, go, go!"

The Auto Auto pulled out and headed away from the dunes. Dugan and Cruz craned their necks to see where the men were. But there were too many people around. Too many cars. They lost track of their pursuers.

The car got onto the main road. A chain of three RVs trailed them out. Yes! Cruz knew the bigger vehicles would slow any traffic behind them. Even so, he wouldn't feel totally safe until they were back with their classmates.

Cruz attempted to smile, but couldn't. They may have evaded their pursuers, but Cruz had lost something very valuable in the battle: his pack. Inside was his tablet, and it contained something that could never be replaced ... something he hadn't told anybody about.

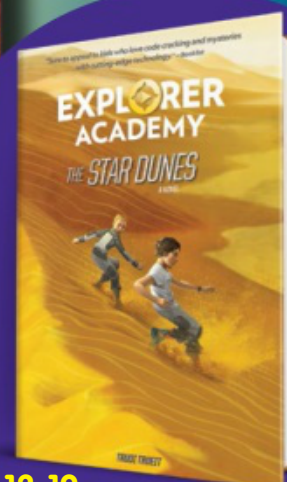
The Explorer Academy students are now in Africa as part of their global expedition aboard the ship *Orion*. And that's where 13-year-old Cruz Coronado is trying to uncover the next piece of a puzzle left behind by his dead mother. But an organization called Nebula will do anything to stop Cruz from finding it.



What was on Cruz's tablet?  
Who has it now—and will he ever  
get it back? Check out

# EXPLORER ACADEMY: THE STAR DUNES

to find out!



Go online February 12-19  
to get a key to crack a code.  
The secret message could win  
you an autographed copy of  
*Explorer Academy:  
The Star Dunes!*

[natgeokids.com/march](http://natgeokids.com/march)

PLAY



## DOWN UNDERWATER

These two scenes in the Great Barrier Reef may seem the same, but look again! Find and circle at least 20 differences between them.

ANSWERS ON PAGE 33



# STUFF

GAMES,  
LAUGHS,  
AND LOTS  
TO DO!





# FUNNY FILL-IN

## BIRDS TO THE RESCUE!

Ask a friend to give you words to fill in the blanks in this story without showing it to him or her. Then read out loud for a laugh.

BY BECKY BAINES

PLAY MORE FUNNY FILL-IN!

[natgeokids.com/ffi](http://natgeokids.com/ffi)



My family went on safari in \_\_\_\_\_ to ride a raft down the \_\_\_\_\_ and check out  
 \_\_\_\_\_ country body of water  
 \_\_\_\_\_. I boarded first. Suddenly the raft began to \_\_\_\_\_. I was \_\_\_\_\_  
 water animal, plural verb verb ending in -ing  
 down the \_\_\_\_\_ by myself! \_\_\_\_\_ miles later a bunch of \_\_\_\_\_  
 liquid large number something that flies, plural  
 surrounded me. They flapped their \_\_\_\_\_, then without warning they grabbed my \_\_\_\_\_  
 animal body part, plural article of clothing  
 and lifted me high into the air. “\_\_\_\_\_!” I yelled. When I finally got the nerve to look down,  
 exclamation  
 I saw some \_\_\_\_\_ cubs and a(n) \_\_\_\_\_ that could run  
 furry animal color spotted animal  
 faster than \_\_\_\_\_. Then I spotted my parents. “Thanks!” I called to the fliers as they  
 famous athlete  
 \_\_\_\_\_ me on the ground. No one at home will believe this \_\_\_\_\_ tale.  
 past-tense verb adjective



# WHAT IN THE WORLD?

## OVER THE RAINBOW

These photographs show close-up views of rainbow-colored objects. Unscramble the letters to identify what's in each picture.

ANSWERS ON PAGE 33



APNTI EST

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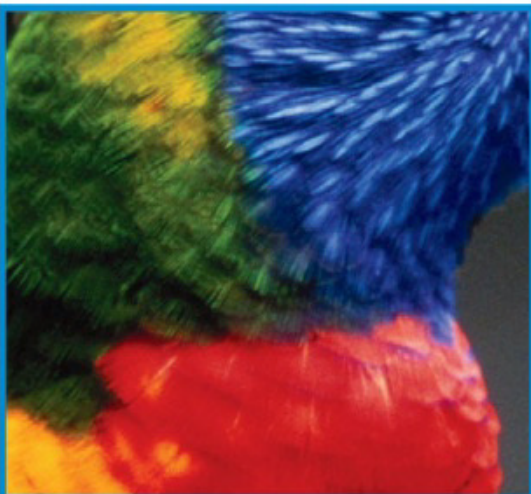
KSOCS

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POLPLIOL

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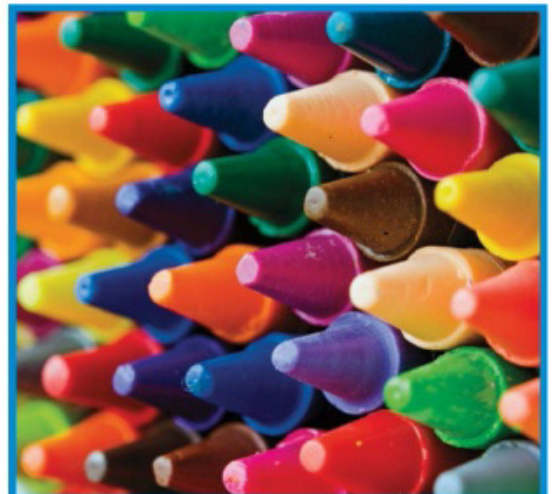
TRAORP

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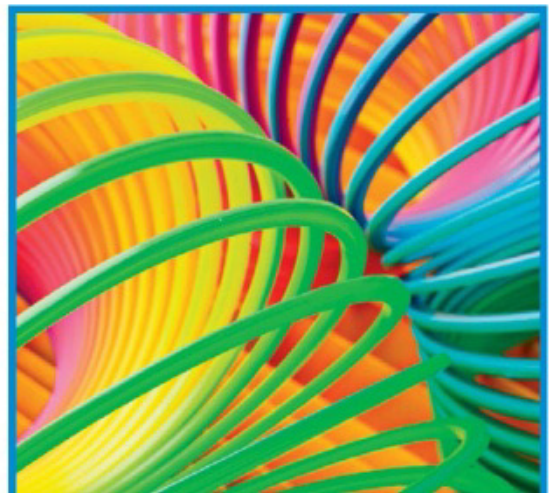
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LABMRELU

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NKISYL

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TOP ROW (LEFT TO RIGHT): ELDORADO SUPERVECTOR / SHUTTERSTOCK; ELENA SCHWEITZER / SHUTTERSTOCK; JEFFREY HAMILTON / DIGITAL VISION / GETTY IMAGES. MIDDLE ROW (LEFT TO RIGHT): PETE TURNER / GETTY IMAGES; OLEKSANDRA NAUMENKO / SHUTTERSTOCK; BOTULINUM21 / SHUTTERSTOCK. BOTTOM ROW (LEFT TO RIGHT): SHANNON ALEXANDER / SHUTTERSTOCK; ANDRIY BONDAREV / GETTY IMAGES; © GARRY GAY / ALAMY.

# LAUGH **OUT LOUD**



"I'M TAKING MY FROG FOR A WALK."



"DIDN'T I TELL YOU TO  
CLEAN OFF YOUR BELLY  
BEFORE SNACK TIME?"



"IT'S JUST UNTIL THE  
BRACES COME OFF."

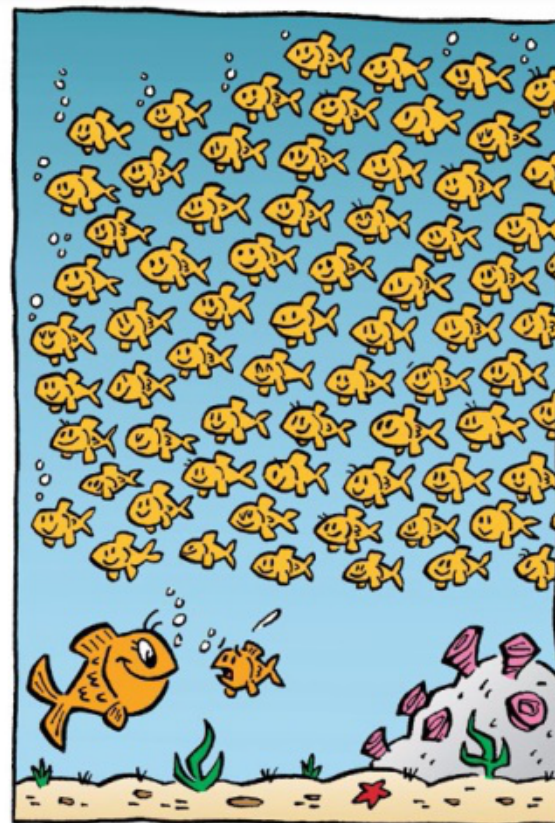
"THE  
BABY'S  
BOTTLE  
IS ALMOST  
READY!"



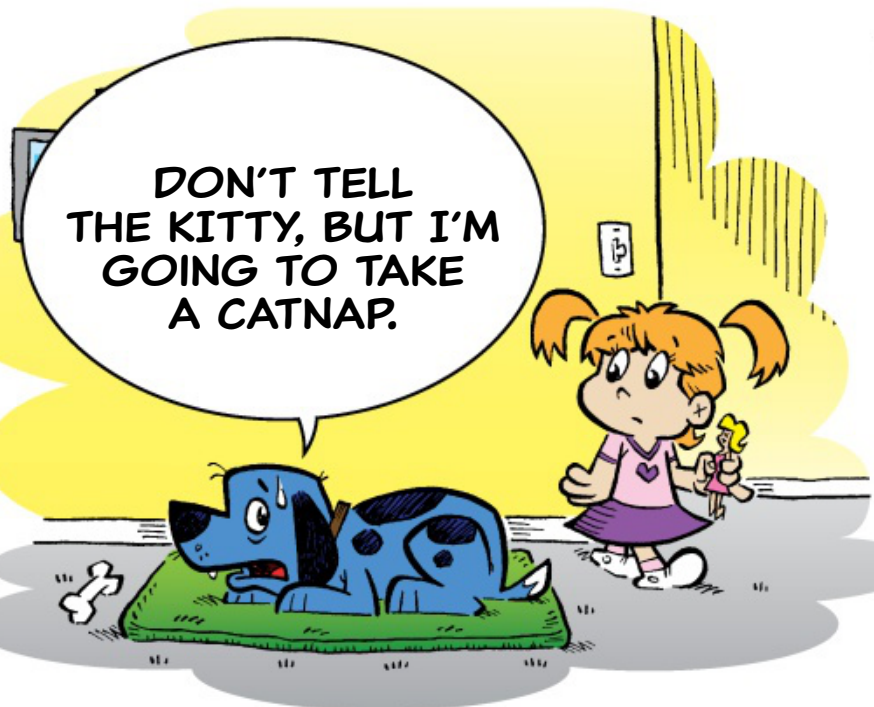


"YOUR MOM SENT ME UP SO YOU WON'T BE LATE FOR SCHOOL AGAIN!"

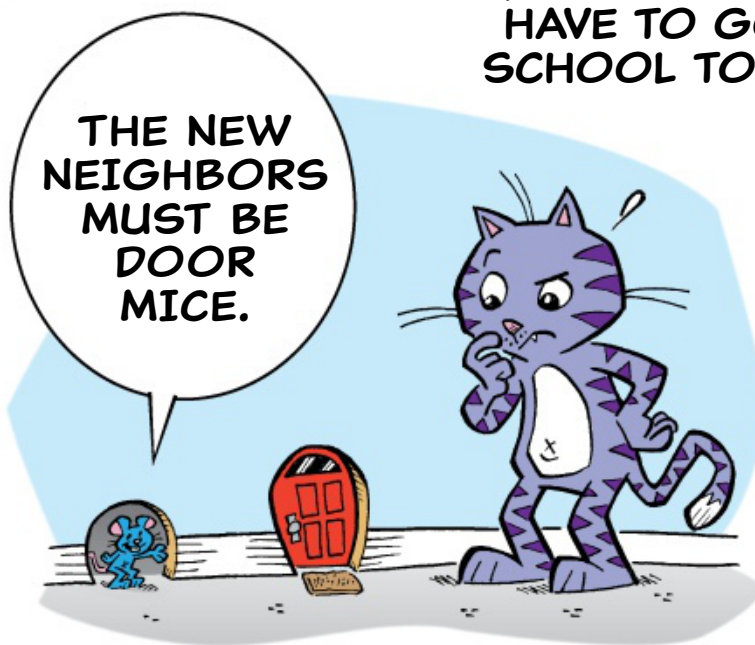
THE NEW NEIGHBORS MUST BE DOOR MICE.



"AW, MOM. DO I REALLY HAVE TO GO TO SCHOOL TODAY?"



DON'T TELL THE KITTY, BUT I'M GOING TO TAKE A CATNAP.



"What in the World?" (page 31): Top row: paint set, socks, lollipop. Middle row: parrot, cake, crayons. Bottom row: sprinkles, umbrella, Slinky.



"Down Underwater" (pages 28-29):

Answers

# kids

## VS. PLASTIC

Do your part to help prevent single-use plastic items from reaching the ocean. Check out ideas here, then go online for more. [natgeokids.com/KidsVsPlastic](https://natgeokids.com/KidsVsPlastic)

**CHOOSE THIS**



**NOT THAT**



### WHY?

**Y**ou might use plastic bags for snacks, but for many animals, the plastic bag is the snack!

The glint of a plastic goodie bag floating in the water can look like a fish. As the plastic fills the animal's stomach, it blocks food from traveling through its intestines, causing it to starve. In fact, one Cuvier's beaked whale was recently discovered with more than 88 pounds of plastic—including snack bags, grocery bags, and nylon ropes—in its stomach.

So instead, store your treats in reusable containers, then toss them in your backpack for on-the-go grub.

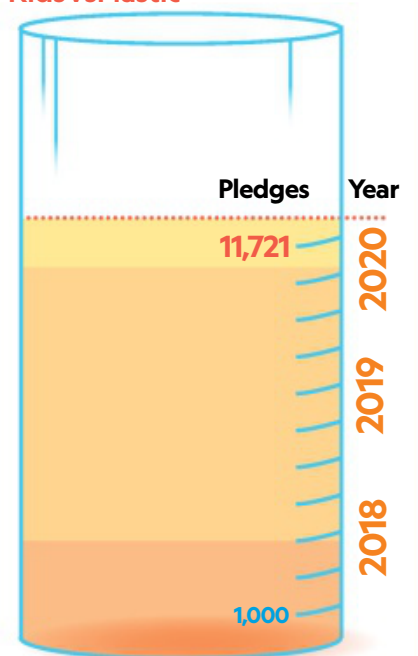


At a recent international coastal cleanup, volunteers collected 938,929 plastic bags (not including grocery bags).

### Make a difference!

Check out how many kids have pledged to reduce their single-use plastic trash, then go online to take the pledge too!

[natgeokids.com/KidsVsPlastic](https://natgeokids.com/KidsVsPlastic)



**Pick Your Perfect**

### SNACK SACK.

Find a reusable food container by choosing the phrase that fits you best.

**1**

I don't want my sandwich to get squished.

Stash it in a sturdy container.

**2**

I want a light and flexible wrap.

Use cloth or beeswax wrap.

**3**

I need a container for messy munchies.

Grab a glass jar.

**4**

I want a pouch that's flexible yet sturdy.

Stuff it in a silicone sack.

**TAKE THE PLASTIC PLEDGE!**  
[natgeokids.com/KidsVsPlastic](https://natgeokids.com/KidsVsPlastic)

**LAST BAG** If you have a few plastic snack bags left at home, keep using them! After each use, wash the bags with soap and water, let them air-dry, then keep reusing. Once they wear out, find a place to recycle them: Many grocery stores accept the bags for recycling.

STEVEN SANDERS / ALAMY (SANDWICH IN CLOTH BAG); FLUSE / GETTY IMAGES (SANDWICH IN PLASTIC BAG); UNKAS\_PHOTO / GETTY IMAGES (BIRD); AC.BNPHOTOS / GETTY IMAGES (STURDY CONTAINER); YELLOWDAFFS / SHUTTERSTOCK (CLOTH WRAP); JENIFOTO / GETTY IMAGES (GLASS JAR); SHANNON HIBBERD / NG STAFF (SILICONE BAG)

I'M A  
LEAN, GREEN,  
BUG-EATING  
MACHINE!

# CRITTER CHAT

If animals used social media, what would they say? Follow this red-eyed tree frog's day as it updates its feed. BY ALLYSON SHAW

## Red-Eyed Tree Frog

**LIVES IN:** Southern Mexico  
and Central America

**SCREEN NAME** FabFrog  
**FRIENDS** 🐸



**KEEL-BILLED  
TOUCAN**



BananaBeak

**CENTRAL AMERICAN  
AGOUTI**



ForestFriend

**KINKAJOU**



KinkaWoo

START

7:20 p.m.



FabFrog

New profile pic alert! How do I look?



Uh, like a snack. But I've found a different treat, so you can chill out ... for now.



BananaBeak

Hey @BananaBeak, where's that tree you're tasting from? I'll munch up whatever fruit you drop. 🐸



ForestFriend



Now I'm in the mood for something sweet. Anybody seen a beehive? #AskingForMyTongue



KinkaWoo

10 p.m.



FabFrog

Thanks to my suction-cup toes, I'm totally an acrobat—er, acro-frog!



KinkaWoo

That looks like a lot of work when you could just *hang* out. Tails are for winners.



BananaBeak

You're all just bummed you're stuck to the trees. I'm a sky princess. 😊



The forest floor is good enough for me. I like my home so much I rub my butt all over it so it smells like me. #Normal



ForestFriend



FabFrog

That's so gross, even for me—and I ooze smelly slime.

5 a.m.



FabFrog

Now you see me—now you don't. #PerfectCamouflage



Are we playing hide-and-seek? I'm pretty great at disappearing in the brush.



ForestFriend

Oh, that reminds me ... I've got to go find my hide-and-sleep tree hole. See y'all tomorrow!



KinkaWoo



FabFrog

PSYCH! I was only hiding to jump out and ambush a moth. #Crunchy



BananaBeak

Whoa—you've got some serious leaping skills. And I thought I was the only one that could fly!

PHOTLUKACS / SHUTTERSTOCK (FROG, LARGE IMAGE); DIRK ERCKEN / SHUTTERSTOCK (FROG PROFILE, ALL); EDUARDO RIVERO / SHUTTERSTOCK (TOUCAN PROFILE, ALL); JAYMI HEIMBUCH / MINDEN PICTURES (AGOUTI PROFILE, ALL); ROLAND SEITRE / MINDEN PICTURES (KINKAJOU PROFILE, ALL); VISUALS UNLIMITED, INC. / GREGORY BASCO / GETTY IMAGES (TOUCAN EATING); ALI ATMACA / ANADOLU AGENCY / GETTY IMAGES (KINKAJOU TONGUE); INGO ARNDT / MINDEN PICTURES (FROG FOOT); ROLAND SEITRE / MINDEN PICTURES (KINKAJOU HANGING); THOMAS HERTWIG / ALAMY (AGOUTI BACKSIDE); CHRISTIAN ZIEGLER / MINDEN PICTURES (FROG CAMOUFLAGE); PINGBAT / SHUTTERSTOCK (CARTOON FACES, ALL)