



ANIMAL NEWS

SUPER RAT!



PDSA

A CLEVER rat has been given a very special award for sniffing out landmines in Cambodia, Southeast Asia.

Giant pouched rat Magawa has been given the PDSA Gold Medal for his life-saving bravery and devotion to duty. The rodent has been trained by charity APOPO to sniff out the chemical compounds in explosives and alert humans, and has so far discovered 39 landmines.

Magawa has managed to help clear the equivalent of 20 football pitches, making lots of land safe for local people.

A **landmine** is an explosive buried just under the surface of the ground, which explodes when stepped on. They were banned in 1997, but sadly many remain hidden in old war zones and cause a terrible hazard to humans and wildlife.

BEAVERS:
NATURE'S FIREFIGHTER?

The Black Rock Inn, California, is destroyed by a wildfire last week



Getty

A NEW study suggests that beavers can help to slow the spread of fire. With wildfires raging across the west coast of America, it could be more important than ever to appreciate the benefits of these clever rodents.

The study looked at the locations of major US wildfires over the last 20 years. It showed that the vegetation in areas where beavers worked their magic was up to three times greener and healthier than other areas.

This is because the beavers make dams, guiding water and forming ponds, meaning that the areas they live in have healthy, well-watered plants. And these green plants are a lot less likely to be set on fire than dry, brown, unhealthy plants.

Emily Fairfax, the leader of the study, said: "It doesn't matter if there's a wildfire right next door. Beaver-dammed areas are green and happy and healthy-looking." Beaver wetlands are safe havens for all sorts of other animals too, as they attract amphibians, reptiles, birds and mammals.

Alexa Whipple, director of the Methow Beaver Project, supports the findings: "If we have a wetter landscape, we are going to resist fire and recover from it better. My hope is that wildfire can be the gateway for people to understand the whole suite of benefits that beavers offer."

LOST
AT SEA!

Scottish SPCA

A SAILOR off the coast of Ayrshire got a surprise this week when a cockatiel (a small parrot) landed on his boat!

The lost bird took refuge on the boat, which was ten miles out to sea. The fisherman on the boat called the Scottish SPCA (Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals), which has taken the cockatiel in. Sheena MacTaggart from the Scottish SPCA said: "Thank goodness the boat was there so the bird found somewhere to rest."

"He had no obvious injuries, and was given some water and food before being taken to our centre in Ayrshire. We have named him Heihei after the bird in the film *Moana*, who stows away on her boat. We thought it was very fitting!"

Heihei does have numbered rings on his legs, but so far the charity has been unable to trace his owners.

If you recognise Heihei or know who he belongs to, you can contact the Scottish SPCA's animal helpline on **03000 999 999**.

Animal News



1. Name the animals in the news and the country the news is from.

Animal	Country

■ Look at the article 'Super rat'.

2. Explain how Magawa the rat has been using his animal senses to help humans.

3. In order to do this job successfully, an animal has to be trained to do **two** things. What are they?

■ Look at the article 'Beavers: Nature's firefighter?'

4. Why is this study about beavers of particular interest to Americans at the moment?

5. Can you explain how beavers help to prevent, or slow down, wildfires?

6a. Look at the words of Emily Fairfax. Find **three adjectives** she uses to describe areas where beavers live.

6b. What is the effect of these words? What sort of picture do they paint of a beaver's habitat?

■ Look at the article 'Lost at sea!'

7. Choose a word from the box to fill the gaps and complete the **news summary**.

A small _____ landed on a fishing boat _____ miles off the coast of _____ last week. The _____ fisherman called an animal _____ charity who rescued the bird and named it after a _____ bird from a film. However they haven't been able to _____ its owner and people have been asked to call their _____ if they have any information.

helpline

Scotland

welfare

ten

parrot

stowaway

trace

shocked

■ Consider all the articles.

8. Three people are **quoted** in the articles – what do they do?

Emily Fairfax	
Alexa Whipple	
Sheena MacTaggart	

9. No-one is quoted in 'Super rat'. Who could the journalist have interviewed in order to get a quotation for this article? Suggest an appropriate person.

10. Why is the parrot in 'Lost at sea!' the odd one out of the three animals in the news? (Tip: consider the relationship between the animals and the humans.)

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TEACHER ANSWERS

AIM OF THE NEWS COMPREHENSIONS: News reports are unique non-fiction texts. Being real, they naturally engage students, and with the range of topics that are covered, help to develop pupils' knowledge and understanding of the wider world outside the classroom. The reports are ideal for short, focused comprehension or discussion activities. Along with the opportunity to find fascinating facts and appreciate the opinions of those involved, there is plenty to be inferred and deduced to understand in more depth what is being reported. Like authors, journalists play with language, so news 'stories' are rich nuggets of text to investigate and provide the opportunity for literacy programmes.

TEACHER ANSWER GUIDE: The teacher answers are intended to provide a quick reference guide. Suggestions are given for the 'Expected response' or starting point that pupils could give. The 'Development' then gives more in-depth ideas that students can work towards as they develop their reading comprehension skills.

For a list of the reading skills used, please email schools@firstnews.co.uk.

1. Name the animals in the news and the country the news is from.

READING SKILL – Find and explain information

Expected response

Animal	Country
Giant pouched rat	Cambodia
Cockatiel	Scotland
Beaver	USA

Look at the article 'Super rat'.**2. Explain how Magawa the rat has been using his animal senses to help humans.**

READING SKILL – Find and explain information

Expected response

- He is using his sense of smell to find landmines and is helping to clear land in Cambodia to make it safe.

3. In order to do this job successfully, an animal has to be trained to do two things. What are they?

READING SKILL – Infer information and justify with evidence

Starting point

1. Recognise the smell of explosives.
2. Alert a human in some way once it has found the explosives.

Look at the article 'Beavers: nature's firefighter?'**4. Why is this study about beavers of particular interest to Americans at the moment?**

READING SKILL – Infer information and justify with evidence

Starting point

- Wildfires are currently raging across the west coast of America.

5. Can you explain how beavers help to prevent, or slow down, wildfires?

READING SKILL – Summarise information from more than one paragraph

Starting point

- Beavers make dams and flood areas, and wet land doesn't burn so much.

Development

- Beavers make dams and create large areas of wetland. This means the plants in that area are green and well-watered, making them less likely to burn.

6a. Look at the words of Emily Fairfax. Find three adjectives she uses to describe areas where beavers live.

READING SKILL – Understand vocabulary in context

Expected response

- Green, happy, healthy-looking.

6b. What is the effect of these words? What sort of picture do they paint of a beaver's habitat?

READING SKILL – Recognising effect of language choices

Starting point

- It makes the beaver areas sound great.

Development

- It creates a very positive picture of a beaver's habitat. It makes them sound as if the area is thriving, not polluted. It suggests it is a habitat that supports lots of plants and animals.

7. Choose a word from the box to fill the gaps and complete the news summary.

READING SKILL – Find and explain information

Expected response

- A small **parrot** landed on a fishing boat **ten** miles off the coast of **Scotland** last week. The **shocked** fisherman called an animal **welfare** charity who rescued the bird and named it after a **stowaway** bird from a film. However they haven't been able to **trace** its owner and people have been asked to call their **helpline** if they have any information.

helpline

Scotland

welfare

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8. Three people are quoted in the articles – what do they do?

READING SKILL – Find and explain information

Expected response

Emily Fairfax	The leader of a new study into beavers and wildfires
Alexa Whipple	Director of the Methow Beaver Project
Sheena MacTaggart	A person who works for the Scottish SPCA

9. No-one is quoted in 'Super rat'. Who could the journalist have interviewed in order to get a quotation for this article?**Suggest an appropriate person.**

READING SKILL – Infer information and justify with evidence

Starting point

- A person from the PDSA who chose to give the medal to Magawa.
- A person from the charity who trained or works with Magawa.
- A person from Cambodia who has been affected by landmines.

10. Why is the parrot in 'Lost at sea!' the odd one out of the three animals in the news? (Tip: consider the relationship between the animals and the humans.)

READING SKILL – Make comparisons between texts

Possible answers**Starting point**

- This is the only animal that has been rescued by a human.
- The other animals are helping humans.
- The cockatiel is a bird; the others are mammals (in fact they are both rodents!)

Development

- The beavers and the rat are helping humans out; they are helping humans overcome difficult and dangerous problems. The cockatiel is the only animal that is being helped by humans.