

# Strange but True: Animals



Over the years, we have learnt a lot about animals but there are some creatures whose behaviours and characteristics can still astonish us. Read on to find out more about some of nature's most bizarre species.

## Cuddly Criminals?

The koala is a cute and fluffy Australian **mammal** known for its tree-hugging pose. It may surprise you to learn that these furry creatures have fingerprints that are almost identical to human fingerprints.



## Did You Know...?

One scientist has even warned the Australian police about koala's fingerprints just in case they ever get confused with human prints at a crime scene!

## Frozen Alive



There is a special type of frog in North America that freezes for up to seven months of the year. In September, the wood frog's heart stops beating and their blood stops flowing. However, the frog thaws out and hops back into action once the warmer weather arrives!

## The T.Rex's Closest Relative

Scientists have often said that birds are the closest living relation to dinosaurs. However, recent research has shown that the nearest modern ancestor to the ferocious Tyrannosaurus rex is a chicken.



## Did You Know...?

Other birds which are close relatives to the dinosaur include: turkeys, ostriches and emus.

### The 500-Year-Old Shark

Can you imagine being alive during the time of King Henry VIII? It is believed that there is a shark alive today that may have been born as long ago as the Tudor times. In 2007, a very old Greenland shark was found in the North Atlantic Ocean. Some scientists have said that this particular shark could be up to 512 years old.



### Did You Know...?

Greenland sharks can live for at least 272 years and aren't fully grown until they are around 150 years old.

### Winged Mathematicians



Studies in the past have shown that some animals (like monkeys and apes) are able to think mathematically. However, pigeons have shown that they can also do the same. Scientists trained pigeons to order numbers of objects. They pecked at sets of objects in sequence (1, 2, 3, etc.) in return for a reward.

### Did You Know...?

It took scientists a year to train the pigeons to order numbers.

### 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 axolotl, which is an **endangered species**, can grow its own replacement **limbs** or even produce extra ones.



### More Fascinating Facts:

- Baby elephants suck on their trunks for comfort.
- Tigers have striped skin, as well as striped fur.
- 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 nearly all of the hunting.

### Glossary

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

**endangered species:** A species of animal or plant that is seriously at risk of becoming extinct.

**limb:** An arm or leg of a person or four-legged animal. It is also a bird's wing.

**mammal:** A warm-blooded animal with a backbone and hair or fur. They give birth to live young.

# Questions

1. Which country is the koala from? Tick one.

- Mexico  
 Australia  
 Africa  
 Greenland

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

The chicken...

The Greenland shark...

The koala...

The axolotl...

can live for at least 272 years.

is the closest living relative to the Tyrannosaurus rex.

can make its own replacement legs.

has fingerprints which are identical to human beings.

3. Find and copy one word which shows that the Tyrannosaurus rex was 'savagely fierce'.

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4. Fill in the missing words.

In September, the wood frog's heart stops

\_\_\_\_\_ and their blood stops \_\_\_\_\_.

5. How long did it take scientists to train the pigeons to order numbers?

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6. Look at the section called **More Fascinating Facts**.

Explain why you think that the author included this in the text

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7. **It may surprise you to learn that these furry creatures have fingerprints that are almost identical to human fingerprints.**

Why does the author suggest that it 'may surprise you' to learn this fact?

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8. Which of the creatures from the text would you most like to learn more about? Give a reason for your answer.

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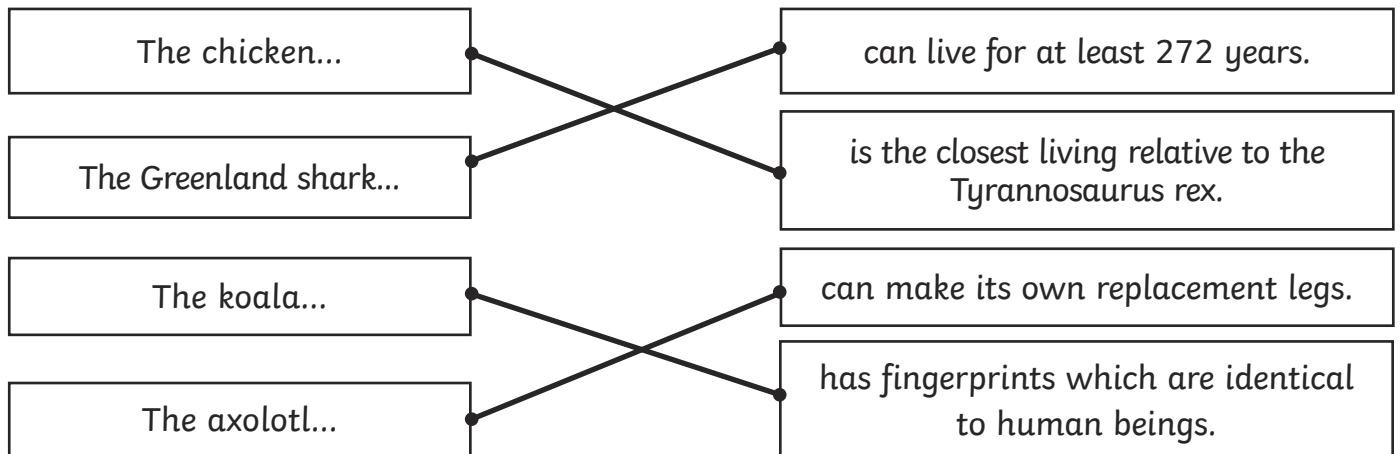
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# Answers

1. Which country is the koala from? Tick one.

- Mexico  
 **Australia**  
 Africa  
 Greenland

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



3. Find and copy one word which shows that the Tyrannosaurus rex was 'savagely fierce'.

**ferocious**

4. Fill in the missing words.

In September, the wood frog's heart stops **beating** and their blood stops **flowing**.

5. How long did it take scientists to train the pigeons to order numbers?

**It took scientists a year to train the pigeons to order numbers.**

6. Look at the section called **More Fascinating Facts**.

Explain why you think that the author included this in the text

**Pupils' own responses, such as: The author may have included this in the text because there are so many other interesting facts about animals that they may have wanted the reader to know about.**

7. **It may surprise you to learn that these furry creatures have fingerprints that are almost identical to human fingerprints.**

Why does the author suggest that it 'may surprise you' to learn this fact?

**Pupils' own responses, such as: This may surprise readers because koalas are very different to human beings. Some people may not expect koala's to have fingerprints and it's even more surprising that they are so similar to human being's fingerprints.**

8. Which of the creatures from the text would you most like to learn more about? Give a reason for your answer.

**Pupils' own responses, such as: I would like to learn more about the wood frog because I find it amazing that a creature can freeze and then come back to life again. I would like to know more about its habitat and what happens before and after it freezes in September.**

# 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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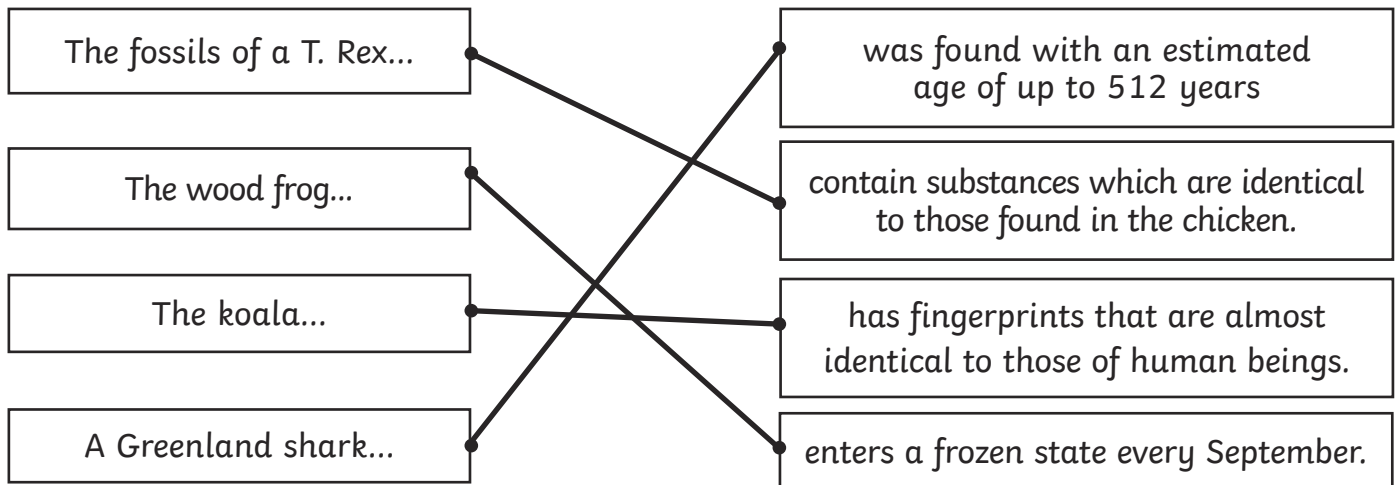
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# Answers

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

- seven months**
- six months
- four months
- eight months

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.

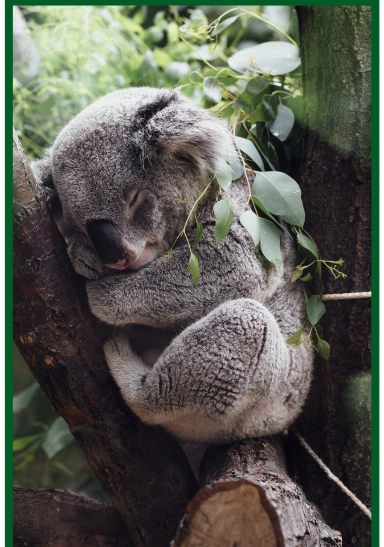
**Pupils' own responses, such as: I found the wood frog the most interesting because I find it amazing that a creature can freeze and then come back into action. I didn't realise an animal's heart could stop for such a long time before beating again.**

# 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!

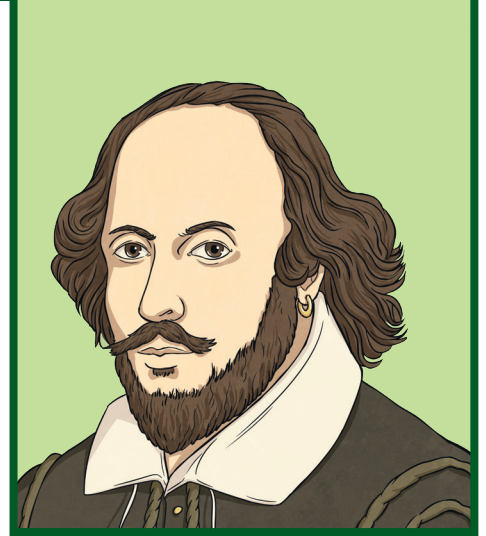
## The T.Rex's Closest Relative

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.



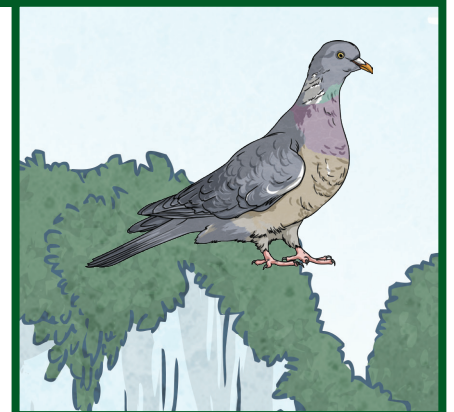
## Four Identical Offspring



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
- 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?

**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.**