



The return to school begins

Primary students in Scotland and Wales are preparing to go back to school from 22 February. Schools across the UK have been closed to most pupils because of the coronavirus outbreak. In Scotland, children in the first three years of primary school, and secondary pupils who need to carry out practical assignments such as chemistry experiments, will go back on 22 February. In Wales, students up to the age of seven will start returning from 22 February.



A gritter named **Snowcilially Distanced.**

Scottish gritters go global

Sir Andy Flurry and Mary Queen of Salt are just two of Scotland's now world-famous snow gritters. After the heavy snow brought by Storm Darcy, gritters took to roads across Scotland to clear the way. People could follow their progress with a tracker online. It received more than 100,000 hits on one day. This is because of the gritters' funny names, chosen by the public. States in the US have now been inspired to start naming contests for their own snow gritters.



Larry the **chief mouser.**

A decade at Number 10

On 15 February, Larry the cat celebrated 10 years at No.10 Downing Street. Larry came to the UK Prime Minister's official residence from Battersea Dogs & Cats Home, London, in 2011. Larry was given the title of chief mouser, and has been a pet to three Prime Ministers. Lindsey Quinlan, from Battersea Dogs & Cats Home, says Larry shows why animals deserve a second chance. "They could become one of the nation's beloved political figures," she says.



A Eurasian **beaver feeding.**

DID YOU KNOW?
Beavers' strong front teeth are orange because they are rich in iron.

Beavers return to Dorset

Beavers have been reintroduced to Dorset, in south-west England, following an absence of around 400 years. The Dorset Wildlife Trust released a pair of adult Eurasian beavers, one male, one female, into a large freshwater habitat on 8 February. The animals came from Scotland but their new home is closed to the public for now. They will be monitored by wildlife experts to see how their presence affects the land around them.

This is the latest stage of a nationwide project to bring beavers back to the UK's rivers. In 2021, the Wildlife Trusts, a national organisation made up of 46 local wildlife charities, aim to reintroduce around 20 beavers to five counties around the UK, including Montgomeryshire, in Wales, and the Isle of Wight, in England.

Beavers were once native to Britain but were hunted to extinction in the 16th century. People wanted them for their fur, meat and the oil in their scent glands. Following their extinction, the kinds of places beavers love to live, such as bogs, lakes, mires and swamps, all declined. Beavers create their habitats by building dams – the animals fell trees

with their teeth and weave branches together, before compacting them with mud.

The Wildlife Trusts say that the beavers' building activity can help stop flooding. It also keeps the water clean and creates homes for other creatures, like voles and otters. In Dorset, the team persuaded local people and farmers to help – at first, some of them had been worried that the beavers' dams would

cause their land to flood or become waterlogged.

In 2004, beavers mysteriously appeared on the River Otter in Devon – the first wild-breeding population in the country for 400 years. Several organisations, including the UK Government, wanted to remove the animals, worrying they would damage the environment. However, the beavers were

studied for five years, and in August 2020 the Government said that the animals had a good effect on these habitats and they were allowed to stay.

Craig Bennett, the head of the Wildlife Trusts, says that the organisation is now calling on the Government to help them "enable beavers to return" so they can "improve wetlands for wildlife".



A beaver falls a **birch tree.**

THE WEEK'S SILLIEST HEADLINE

"Pigs can play video games, scientists discover" *theconversation.com*



schools.theweekjunior.co.uk

Beavers return to Dorset

Once you have read the article, try any of the following activities...



Hold a debate

It's a remarkable story – beavers returning to the south west of England after 400 years. Doesn't it feel good to know that we can undo an ecological disaster that humans inflicted on the area all that time ago? The fact that it could have a positive effect on flood prevention is an added bonus. Or is this just another way of arrogantly interfering with nature? Shouldn't we be solving flood issues ourselves rather than leaving it to beavers to deal with? And where does it stop? There are plenty of other animals that have been made extinct in the UK. Should we reintroduce bears and wolves as well? What do you think?

Writing challenge!

Choose one of the following writing warm-ups.

1 Investigate how beavers build dams across rivers then rewrite your research as a set of instructions. Don't forget to include a brief introduction, a 'what you need' section (including key parts of a beaver's body) and a numbered series of steps using sequencing adverbials and imperative verbs.

or

2 Imagine you are really living 400 years in the future but you have been brought back to your current home by a time machine. Write a diary entry about your visit to your 'old' house, describing your feelings on seeing the way we 'used to live' and discovering things that you use today but would seem very dated to someone from the future.

Investigate

Research three or four animals that used to live in the UK but do not anymore. Write a brief fact file about each, describing their key features, when they died out, why they died out, their preferred habitat and what they ate.