

# This week's big news

## Virtual Grand National raises millions for NHS

A virtual version of the Grand National, which is the UK's most watched horse race, was held on 4 April. The normal race was cancelled because of the coronavirus outbreak, so a computer-generated version of the event was held instead.

The race raised £2.6 million for charities helping the NHS (National Health Service). Usually people place bets with bookmakers (companies who take bets from customers) on where a horse will finish in the race, in an attempt to win money. If the person loses, the bookmaker keeps the money. However, this year bookmakers decided to donate to charity any money they made from the race.

The result was worked out by computers that calculated how the real horses would probably have performed, and special computer-generated imagery was used to create lifelike versions of the horses. Around 4.8 million people watched on television as a horse called Potters Corner won the race. Christian Williams, the trainer of the real-life Potters Corner, watched at home with his family. First held in 1836, the Grand National is one of the world's most famous races.



Watching the virtual race.



Whale sharks are the world's biggest fish.

**SLOW SHARKS**  
Whale sharks move at a rate of just three miles per hour as they travel through the ocean.

## Secrets of the whale shark revealed

Scientists have been able to work out the age of the world's largest fish, thanks to explosive new data. Researchers used evidence generated by historic bomb tests to calculate the lifespan of whale sharks.

Despite relying on a diet of tiny organisms called plankton, the sharks can grow to 18 metres long, making them one of the gentle giants of the tropical oceans. Although they allow people get close to them, it is difficult to know how long they live.

To help solve the mystery, researchers at the Australian Institute of Marine Science decided to look at the vertebrae of dead sharks. Vertebrae are the segments of bone or cartilage (a firm type of tissue) that form an animal's backbone or spinal column. There are distinct lines in whale sharks' vertebrae that appear over time, in the same way that rings appear in a tree trunk. However, the scientists didn't know how often new lines appeared.

From the late 1940s, different countries tested new explosives, called atomic bombs, in locations across the world. These tests were carried out by China, France, the UK, the US and others, and led to a new isotope being released into the atmosphere. Isotopes are different versions of the same atom, the smallest possible type of chemical elements.

This isotope, called carbon-14, has been absorbed by every living thing on Earth. The older an animal is, the less carbon-14 its body contains, so scientists looked at how much was in the sharks' vertebrae.

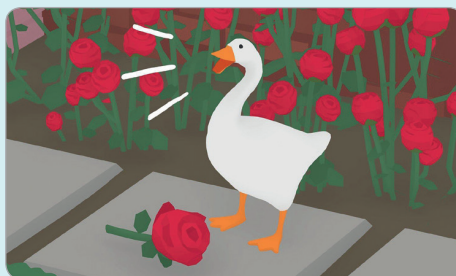
Based on this research, the team realised that the sharks could live for at least 50 years, perhaps even 150 years. Now that they know how long the animals live, scientists can make a stronger argument for giving the sharks better protection from fishing. Overfishing causes more harm to species that live for a long time, because populations can't recover as quickly.



## IT'S AN AMAZING WEEK FOR...

### A SPECIAL FRIENDSHIP

Orangutans and otters have been seen playing together at the Pairi Daiza zoo, in Belgium. The otters live in the same area as the orangutans and like to get out of the water to keep the great apes entertained. "It makes life fun for both species," said Mathieu Goedefroy, who works at the zoo.



### THIS VIDEO GAME

On 2 April, *Untitled Goose Game* won family game of the year at the 16th annual BAFTA Games Awards. In the game, players control a goose that is terrorising locals in a small village. The game has been a huge success, selling over a million copies. This year's winners were revealed on a livestream.

### A LUCKY FIND

A UK nurse was mowing the grass in her garden when she discovered her engagement ring, which went missing two and a half years ago. Alison Brown and her husband are due to celebrate their 15th wedding anniversary later this year, and she said the timely find would give her "strength and positivity" in her work treating coronavirus patients.

Alison Brown with her husband.



# A Special Friendship

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

## Investigate

Write a fact file about either orangutans or otters. Include as much detail as you can about their natural habitat, diet, behaviour and any threats they face.



## Writing challenge!

Choose one of the following writing warm-ups.

**1** Imagine a conversation between the orangutan and the otters as part of a scene in a drama. Make it as funny or serious as you like and remember to use the conventions of a playscript, including stage directions.

or

**2** Write a recount of the last time you went to a zoo, farm or other venue which featured live animals. Remember to write in the first person and chronological order, with a final paragraph that summarised your feelings about the outing.

## Hold a debate with your family

Without doubt, this is a very sweet story and there has never been a better time for articles that raise a smile. However, doesn't this highlight a different issue? Why do we still need zoos? It's clearly unnatural to keep animals locked up, far from their natural habitats. Anyway, wildlife documentaries give us a much better idea of what these creatures are like. Or do you think that there's no real harm in it? The animals are very well looked after and many zoos do an excellent job in helping to protect endangered species. What do you think?