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SCHOLASTIC

NEWS

Edition 4

Aye-aye

Which Animal Would You Want to **SAVE?**

Cute, cuddly animals get most of the attention, but not-so-cute animals need our help too.

Polar bear

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

BIG DEBATE: Are youth sports too intense?



See a city that's made of ice.



Who Are You Calling

UGLY?

Scientists say it's important to protect even the most unusual-looking and odd creatures.

GO
ONLINE!

Meet more
odd-looking
animals.

AS YOU
READ

How does an animal's appearance affect how people feel about it?

How would you describe the polar bear on the cover of the magazine? Cute? Cuddly? You likely wouldn't say the same about the animal above it, a type of lemur called an aye-aye. With its oversized ears and bony fingers, this creature is often described as odd—or even ugly.

Though the two animals look different, they have something important in common. They're both in trouble in the wild. But, experts say, most people are more eager to help animals that make us go *awww*.

"Unattractive animals get a lot less attention," says scientist Charlie Debenham. "We overlook them or are even **repulsed** by them."

Debenham works with the EDGE of Existence program at the Zoological Society of London, in England. Its goal is to celebrate and protect the creepiest and weirdest creatures.

Endangered Oddballs

Vultures

Range: every continent except Australia and Antarctica

Vultures are nature's cleanup crew. They eat the bodies of dead animals. The rotting meat can carry bacteria that would make other animals sick.

Who Gets Protected?

Nearly 14,000 animal species are known to be endangered. Conservation groups spread the word about the dangers many animals face and raise money to help them survive.

But not all animals get the same treatment. A 2012 study found that conservation groups usually focus on the most attractive ones. It's easier to convince people to help them.

That's why you probably know that tigers and giant pandas are endangered. But you don't hear much about the importance of saving vultures.

Why Looks Matter

The things we may find unattractive in animals are often **adaptations** that help them survive. For example, the aye-aye uses its huge ears to listen for insects moving inside tree branches. It then scoops them out with its extra-long middle finger and eats them.

But the aye-aye's appearance is also a big reason that it's in trouble. In the past, local

Why the Aye-aye Matters

The aye-aye plays a key role in its ecosystem. For example, it's one of the only animals that can reach the larvae of beetles that bore, or dig, into dead trees. If there were no aye-ayes . . .



MADAGASCAR



There would be more beetles.

The beetles might eat through the wood faster.

Small animals that live in the wood, such as hedgehogs and frogs, might lose their shelter.

people viewed it as a sign of bad luck and killed it on sight.

"The aye-aye is an animal that truly suffers for its ugliness," says Debenham.

Ugly but Important

Every animal serves a purpose, says Debenham, no matter how odd or scary it might seem. For example, the aye-aye's island home of Madagascar would be different without it (see "Why the Aye-aye Matters").

Debenham hopes people will learn to appreciate the world's not-so-cuddly animals.

"Weird and wonderful species deserve to be protected," she says. "If they disappear, there will be nothing else like them on Earth."

—by Jennifer Li Shotz

WORDS TO KNOW

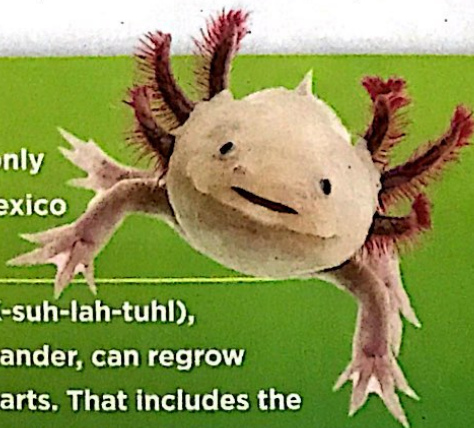
repulsed *verb, past tense.* felt dislike or disgust for something

adaptations *noun, plural.* characteristics that help an animal or a plant survive in its environment

Axolotls

Range: found only in lakes near Mexico City, Mexico

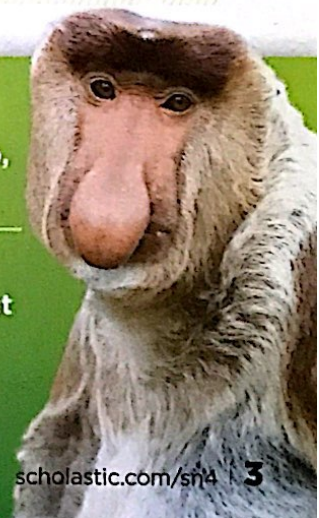
The axolotl (AK-suh-lah-tuhl), a type of salamander, can regrow missing body parts. That includes the feathery gills on its head.



Proboscis Monkeys


Range: found only on Borneo, an island in Southeast Asia

The male's oversized nose helps it make calls that attract mates. The monkeys also replant forests by spreading seeds in their poop.



**BIG
DEBATE**

ARE YOUTH SPORTS TOO INTENSE?



Ten-year-old Rogan Miller spends nearly all of his free time playing basketball. Most days after school, Rogan practices at the gym near his home in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. He spends hours copying the moves of professional players. On weekends, he travels hours to compete in tournaments and plays as many as five games. One website lists Rogan as the 24th-best basketball player in the U.S. among fifth-graders.

"I know one day, if I keep practicing, I can make it to the NBA," says Rogan.

Rogan is one of countless kids across the U.S. who dream of one day going pro. Many train and compete year-round in sports such as gymnastics, soccer, and tennis.

But not everyone thinks all that competition is a good idea.

Some people say it takes the fun out of playing.

Here are two views about youth sports.

WORDS TO KNOW

professional *adjective.* related to being paid to do something others do for fun, such as playing sports

elite *adjective.* superior in quality, rank, or skill

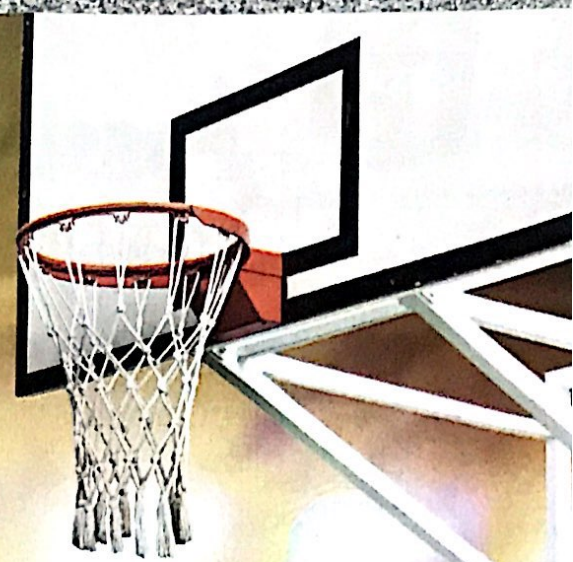
YES!

Sports should be about having fun.

Sports can seem like a full-time job for kids. Weekends and school breaks often involve traveling to faraway tournaments. That can mean giving up time with friends and family. Being so focused on a sport forces many young athletes to give up their hobbies and other interests.

Also, training to become an elite athlete can be expensive. A lot of parents pay for their kids to join top travel teams and hire personal coaches. Many people worry that young athletes and their parents are setting unrealistic goals. The chances of playing a sport professionally are extremely slim.

Many young athletes end up pushing themselves too hard and get injured. Others burn out from all the pressure. In fact, 7 out of 10 kids who play organized sports quit by age 13, according to the National Alliance for Youth Sports.



By the Numbers

Only **1** of every **1,300** high school basketball or football players make it to the pros.

Note: Figures are estimates
Source: National Collegiate Athletic Association

Serena Williams

3 years old
age she began playing tennis

14 years old
age at which she turned pro

\$92.5 million*
amount of her career earnings

*Source: Women's Tennis Association

NO!

There's nothing wrong with working hard.

Many people argue that playing sports is similar to playing piano, chess, or anything else: To be your best, you must practice. They point out that top athletes, like Serena Williams, began training at a young age. Many kids know that facing the best competition is a great way to build their skills. And that often requires traveling to tournaments.

Many parents say they'd rather their kids play sports than spend their free time playing video games. They say as long as kids are having fun and not being pushed too hard, where's the harm?

"I love the game," Rogan says. "It doesn't feel like work." Plus, young athletes learn the value of hard work and determination. That can help them succeed as adults—and not just in sports.

WHAT'S YOUR OPINION?

Do you think youth sports are too intense? Use evidence from the article to prepare for a class discussion.

You can cast your vote at scholastic.com/sn4.

Serena Williams
as a kid

IN THE NEWS

Fossils Found in HOLLYWOOD

Los Angeles, California, is the land of movie stars, palm trees—and ancient mammoths! Since 2014, workers have been expanding a subway tunnel beneath the busy city streets. So far, they've uncovered more than 2,000 animal fossils during the dig.

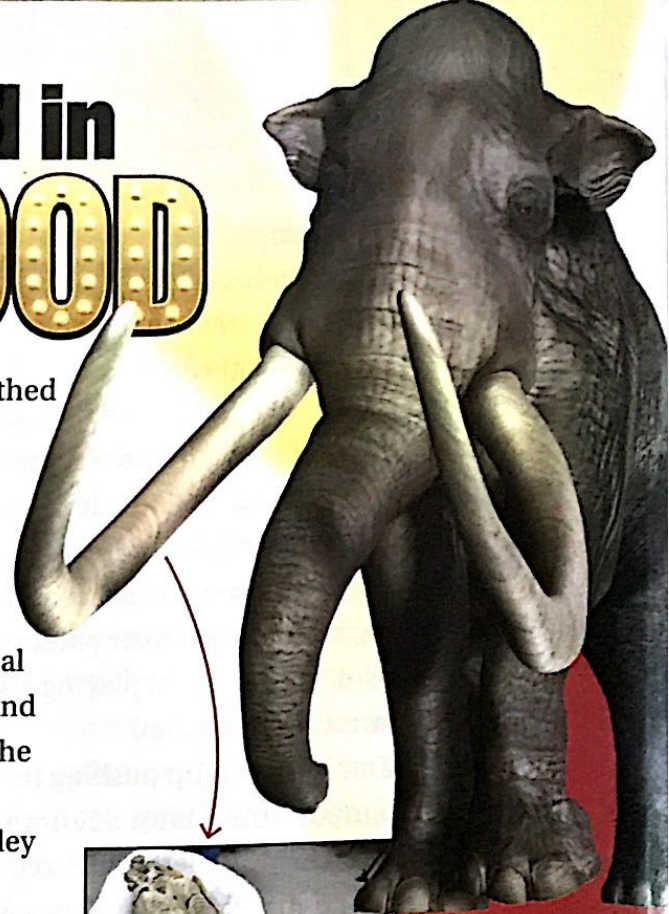
The fossils date back to the last ice age, which ended about 12,000 years ago. Ice ages were long periods when much of Earth was covered in snow and ice.

The discoveries include the

remains of saber-toothed cats and giant sloths. But the biggest star was found last year: the nearly complete skull of a Columbian mammoth. The animal was a slightly larger and less hairy relative of the woolly mammoth.

Paleontologist Ashley Leger says these discoveries show what California was like thousands of years ago.

"Every fossil tells a story," she says.



Scientists nickname the Columbian mammoth skull (left) Hayden.

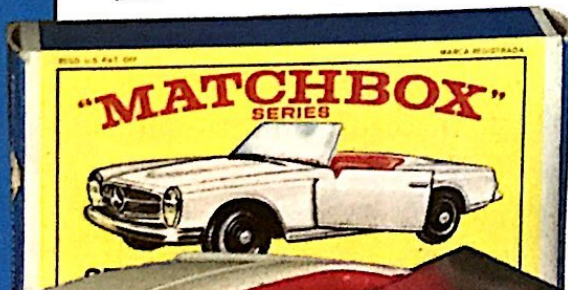
TOP TOYS

It was a close race, but Matchbox Cars zoomed across the finish line and into history. In November, the classic toy was inducted into the National Toy Hall of Fame. Two other timeless toys were also honored—a card game called Magic: The Gathering and the classic coloring book.

Every year, the hall of fame honors toys that have been popular for many years and have inspired creativity. This year's winners beat out finalists including Care Bears and the Nerf Blaster. So far, 71 toys have been inducted into the hall. They are on display at the Strong Museum of Play in Rochester, New York, which is home to the hall of fame.

YOUR TURN

What toy would you pick to be in the hall of fame?



Winter Wonderland

Brrrr! Right about now, the average daytime temperature in Harbin, China, is a bone-chilling 9 degrees Fahrenheit. That's almost as cold as the inside of your freezer!

But the teeth-chattering temperatures don't stop tourists from visiting the city in northeastern China. Each winter, more than a million people flock to Harbin for the city's International Ice and Snow Sculpture Festival. It is one of the largest winter celebrations in the world.

Ice City

Harbin has hosted the yearly festival for 36 years. Visitors can ride special bikes

on the ice and zip down supersized ice slides. But the main attraction is a frozen city made up of about 100 icy buildings. Many are designed to look like famous landmarks, such as New York City's Empire State Building.

Cool Carving

It takes months to create this frozen wonder. Thousands of workers cut blocks of ice from the frozen Songhua [sohng-hwah] River and move them to the festival site. Sculptors use saws, chisels, and other tools to carve the blocks of ice and stack them, creating buildings and other shapes.

This year's festival kicks off on January 5. It will end in late

February, when the weather begins to warm up. But this wonderland will be back again next winter!

MAP IT OUT



In what direction would you travel to get from China's capital city to the Harbin festival?



Pipichai/Shutterstock.com (cover), Jim Mahon/Magnum® (map), FRED DOUTOUR/AFP via Getty Images (day), apobronsky/Shutterstock.com (night)

Some ice buildings are more than 130 feet tall.

HARBIN IN DAYTIME

The blocks of ice are 3 feet thick.

HARBIN AT NIGHT

GO ONLINE!

Take a tour of this amazing city.

PICTOGRAPH

THE COST OF YOUTH SPORTS

For families of young athletes, paying for league fees, equipment, travel, and lessons can really add up. The pictograph below shows the average amount that families spend for one child to play certain sports each year.



Note: Figures are rounded to the nearest \$100. Source: The Aspen Institute State of Play: Trends and Developments in Youth Sports, 2019

- 1 What is the average yearly cost to play ice hockey?
 (A) \$130 (B) \$260 (C) \$1,300 (D) \$2,600
- 2 On average, playing basketball costs about _____.
 (A) the same as lacrosse
 (B) twice as much as tennis
 (C) half as much as swimming
 (D) \$100 less than baseball

WRITE ABOUT IT!

Reflect on your own experience playing a sport. Did you play on an organized team or in P.E. class? Write a personal narrative explaining whether that experience encouraged you to play sports or discouraged you from playing them.

Who Are You Calling Ugly? pages 2-3

- 1 What is the main idea of the article?
 (A) Polar bears are cuter than aye-eyes.
 (B) Many people think vultures are creepy.
 (C) It's important to protect odd-looking animals.
 (D) There are nearly 14,000 endangered animals.
- 2 How does the aye-aye suffer for its ugliness?
 (A) It has oversized ears and bony fingers.
 (B) It's been killed by people who consider it a sign of bad luck.
 (C) It eats insects from trees.
 (D) It regrows missing body parts.
- 3 Which is an example of an *adaptation*?
 (A) a group that protects weird-looking creatures
 (B) the male proboscis monkey's long nose
 (C) an animal living on the ocean floor
 (D) a forest where the aye-aye lives

Are Youth Sports Too Intense? pages 4-5

- 4 Which detail from the article best supports the idea that youth sports can be good for kids?
 (A) "Sports can seem like a full-time job for kids."
 (B) "Young athletes learn the value of hard work and determination."
 (C) "People say it takes the fun out of playing."
 (D) "Many train and compete year-round."
- 5 Which is most opposite in meaning to *elite*?
 (A) not very good (B) professional (C) better in quality (D) skilled
- 6 The author mentions Serena Williams mainly to show that _____.
 (A) tennis is the best sport for kids
 (B) many young athletes lose interest in sports
 (C) many top athletes started training as kids
 (D) tennis players are the highest-paid athletes

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