

## WHY DO PEOPLE FALL FOR CONSPIRACY THEORIES?

Conspiracy theories are often crazy, making out that the truth is some kind of cunning cover-up.

Dr Allington says one of the main reasons people believe in conspiracies is because they're deliberately designed to sound like really good stories. Even though men have landed on the moon six times, decades later there are still lots of people who believe the landings were faked and filmed in a studio on Earth. Saying NASA made it all up and pulled the wool over the whole world's eyes might be a good story, but you have to ignore reality and evidence for it to make any sense.

## ARE CONSPIRACY THEORIES DANGEROUS?

The moon landing example is pretty harmless, but when conspiracy theories involve vaccines or the new coronavirus, it can mean that people stop listening to medical advice that could save their lives.

"For example, there is a small group of people who believe that COVID-19 is caused by the introduction of 5G [a new, faster version of mobile internet]," says Dr Allington. "Because they blame 5G, they're not wearing masks, they're not social distancing. Some people have even set fire to mobile phone masts in protest.

"In a series of surveys earlier this year, we looked at what people believe about COVID-19, where people get their information from about it, and whether they are following the Government guidelines. We found that people who take their information from social media are more likely to believe in conspiracy theories about COVID-19.

"The people who believe in these conspiracy theories are also less likely to be following guidelines. Someone who believes that the symptoms of COVID-19 are caused by 5G is more likely to have gone outside with possible symptoms than somebody who doesn't believe that. We have clear evidence that people who believe in these false stories are more likely to behave in a way that puts themselves and others at risk."

## WHAT EFFECTS DO CONSPIRACY THEORIES HAVE?

Conspiracy theories are dangerous because it means people point fingers in the wrong direction, and this can lead to persecution [cruel and unfair treatment of a group of people].



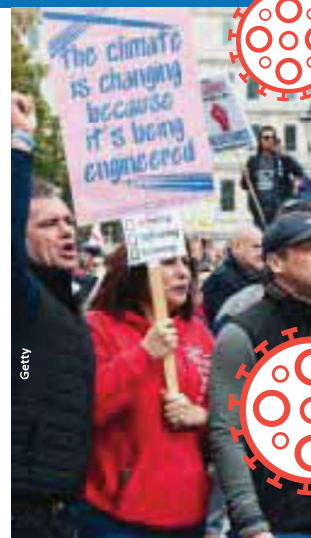
# WHY DO PEOPLE BELIEVE FAKE NEWS?

**YOU don't have to look online for long to find all sorts of fake news. It includes what are known as 'conspiracy theories' – wild ideas that ignore basic facts, science and evidence. To learn more, we spoke to Dr Daniel Allington, a senior lecturer at King's College London and an expert in the social science behind why people believe in conspiracy theories.**

"The main example of this is Nazi Germany," Dr Allington says. "Adolf Hitler claimed that all of Germany's problems were caused by Jewish people, which is why Germany carried out the Holocaust [the murder of six million Jews during World War Two]. The Nazis believed that, although the Jews seemed to be powerless, they



One anti-mask protest in Trafalgar Square saw 16 people arrested and nine police officers injured



were secretly in control of everything."

Anti-Semitism (hatred of Jews) has been creeping into conspiracy theories for hundreds of years, with false accusations that Jewish people are secretly running the world.

It's also still shockingly common to see people spreading the conspiracy theory that the Holocaust didn't happen. Germany and more than a dozen other countries have made Holocaust denial illegal.

## HOW DO WE KNOW CONSPIRACY THEORIES AREN'T TRUE?

Dr Allington says that in order for most conspiracy theories to be real, "you would need thousands and thousands of people working together for the conspiracy, without one of them spilling the beans. People just aren't like that – people talk.

"It's just impossible to keep anything that involves thousands of people a secret. Not even prime ministers or presidents can control everything to the level that conspiracy theorists say they do.

"When problems happen, people want an explanation that feels right to them, but this can mean ignoring real problems."

## HOW DO WE STOP THE SPREAD OF CONSPIRACIES?

In the UK, the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO) was set up to prevent lies being published in newspapers; Ofcom is an organisation that does the same for television. But on social media, there's no IPSO or Ofcom to step in when people are spreading misinformation and lies.

A tip from Dr Allington: "If you're seeing something only on social media, and you're not seeing it in newspapers or on television, then it's probably wrong. There's just not the same level of journalism there. So, you should make sure that you're getting your news from reputable sources."

**If you want to find out more about how to spot conspiracy theories and fake news, your teacher can get First News' free Special Edition, Making Sense Of The News, at [first.news/fakenews](http://first.news/fakenews).**



ZSL London Zoo

# CREATURE COUNT

**ZOOS may be closed because of lockdown, but keepers at ZSL London Zoo still have a very big job ahead of them this week – counting all the animals.**

Every year, the staff at ZSL London Zoo do an annual stocktake and count every creature that lives at the zoo. The zoo must catalogue every living creature once a year, as part of the rules of its zoo licence. With more than 400 species calling the zoo home, it's a pretty mammoth task.

Despite being a bad year, in 2020 the zoo welcomed a host of new arrivals, including Ede the okapi (pictured), who was born in September.

The data from the annual stocktake is added to an international database, which helps conservationists keep an eye on animal species and their populations in captivity.

## SNAKE SHIMMY

**SCIENTISTS** have discovered that brown tree snakes in Guam have an unusual way of moving, which helps them to catch birds.

A team from Colorado State University and the University of Cincinnati found that the snakes use a move that's been named lasso locomotion, which allows them to move and shimmy up large cylinders, like drain pipes, trees and power poles. The lasso-like body position helps them get to places other snakes can't, which means they can find different prey, including endangered bird species. It is the first time movement like this has been recorded in snakes.

Since brown tree snakes were accidentally introduced to the island of Guam in the late 1940s, the population of forest birds has dropped steadily. It is hoped that this discovery will help people find new ways to protect endangered birds from the snakes.

The full report is published in *Current Biology*.



Tom Selbert, Colorado State University



Bjorn Lardner, United States Geological Survey

## KITTENS SAVED!

**TWO newborn kittens have been rescued by the RSPCA after being found at a recycling centre.**

The tiny kittens were spotted on a rubbish conveyor belt by an eagle-eyed worker who plucked them to safety. It's believed they were born in a recycling bin that was collected by workers, before being tipped onto the conveyor belt. Staff at the Hartlepool recycling plant called the RSPCA, who came to collect the tiny male kittens. They were taken to Stanhope Park Veterinary Hospital, where they are being hand-reared. They will then be rehomed when they are old enough.



RSPCA

## BITESIZE NEWS

**RESEARCHERS** have captured rare footage of a jaguar hunting another predatory cat.

The footage, taken from a camera trap in Guatemala, shows a male jaguar waiting at a waterhole to ambush its prey. He ignores a large tapir that passes, but soon after attacks and carries off an ocelot. The footage was shot during a particularly dry spell and scientists are looking into whether there is a link between predator-on-predator attacks and a shortage in water supplies. The full research has been published in the journal *Biotropica*.



Washington State University



# THE JOINT WARMEST YEAR

A packed Brighton beach during last August's heatwave

LAST year was the Earth's joint warmest in history, according to the European Union's Copernicus Climate Change Service.

Despite coronavirus lockdowns all around the world leading to a drop in fossil fuel use, 2020 matched 2016 for the highest global temperatures ever recorded. Copernicus experts say the last six years are the warmest six on record.

The average surface temperature across the planet last year was around 1.25°C higher than the 1850-1900 pre-industrial period. 2020 was also 0.6°C warmer than the average across 1981-2010.

Europe had its warmest year on record last year, at 1.6°C above the 1981-2010 period, and 0.4°C warmer

than 2019. In the UK, we experienced our longest stretch of temperatures above 34°C since records began in the 1960s. For six days last August, the thermometer was above 34°C, while the third hottest day ever (37.8°C) was recorded in the UK in July.

The increasing temperatures worldwide continue to have a direct effect on the planet. Last year's warming temperatures led to a very active wildfire season in parts of the Arctic Circle. Fires released a record 244 megatonnes of carbon dioxide in 2020. That's over a third more than the 2019 record. Levels of

Arctic sea ice also dropped in 2020.

Experts have responded to the worrying data by calling for urgent action to slow down global warming. The European Commission's Matthias Petzschke said: "The extraordinary climate events of 2020 and the data from the Copernicus Climate Change Service show us that we have no time to lose."

As First News went to press, more data about 2020's temperatures was due to be published by NASA and the UK's Met Office.



## NEW COVID DRUGS APPROVED

TWO medicines used to treat a condition called rheumatoid arthritis have been found to help save the lives of coronavirus patients.

Last week, the NHS began using tocilizumab and sarilumab on the sickest COVID-19 patients. The drugs reduce the risk of death by 24%.

Both medicines work by reducing inflammation in the body. A small number of people with COVID-19 suffer a serious reaction that causes their immune systems to go into overdrive. That leads to dangerous levels of inflammation and organ damage, which can be fatal.

A recent study analysed the effects of tocilizumab and sarilumab on 792 patients in six countries across 21 days.

Doctors found the drugs had a big impact on reducing the chances of a

seriously ill patient dying. The medicines also helped people recover far more quickly, leaving intensive care units up to ten days earlier than people who did not take them. The drugs will not be used for people with mild illness.

In other COVID news, new research from Wuhan in China has found that most patients taken to hospital with the virus still have at least one symptom six months after falling ill.

Some 1,733 patients were monitored, and a shocking 76% of them were still suffering half a year later. The most common symptom was fatigue (extreme tiredness), followed by sleep difficulties and anxiety or depression.

## IDENTICAL TWINS NOT SO IDENTICAL



A NEW study by scientists in Iceland has found that identical twins do not have identical genes.

Twins who look the same develop from a single fertilised egg. Experts looked at DNA from 387 pairs of identical siblings, and found "early mutations". These are changes in a sequence of DNA that can affect physical features, such as height. Mutations take place when a cell divides and an error is made as the DNA is being copied. The study in Iceland found that, on average, identical twins had 5.2 mutations, but some pairs had up to 100.



This report is from the Science Museum in London

### HAVE you spent more time in the kitchen lately?

You may have noticed that it's the room most likely to be full of gadgets. In fact, our kitchens are full of technological innovations!

Even Victorian and Edwardian kitchens of wealthy families were full of cleverly engineered appliances and utensils, from cutting-edge gas cookers, water-cooled refrigerators and ovens with adjustable temperatures.

Gadgets that to us may seem ordinary, like kettles, kitchen scales and saucepans, helped transform cooking at the end of the Victorian age.

You can find out more at [tinyurl.com/KitchenTech](https://tinyurl.com/KitchenTech).



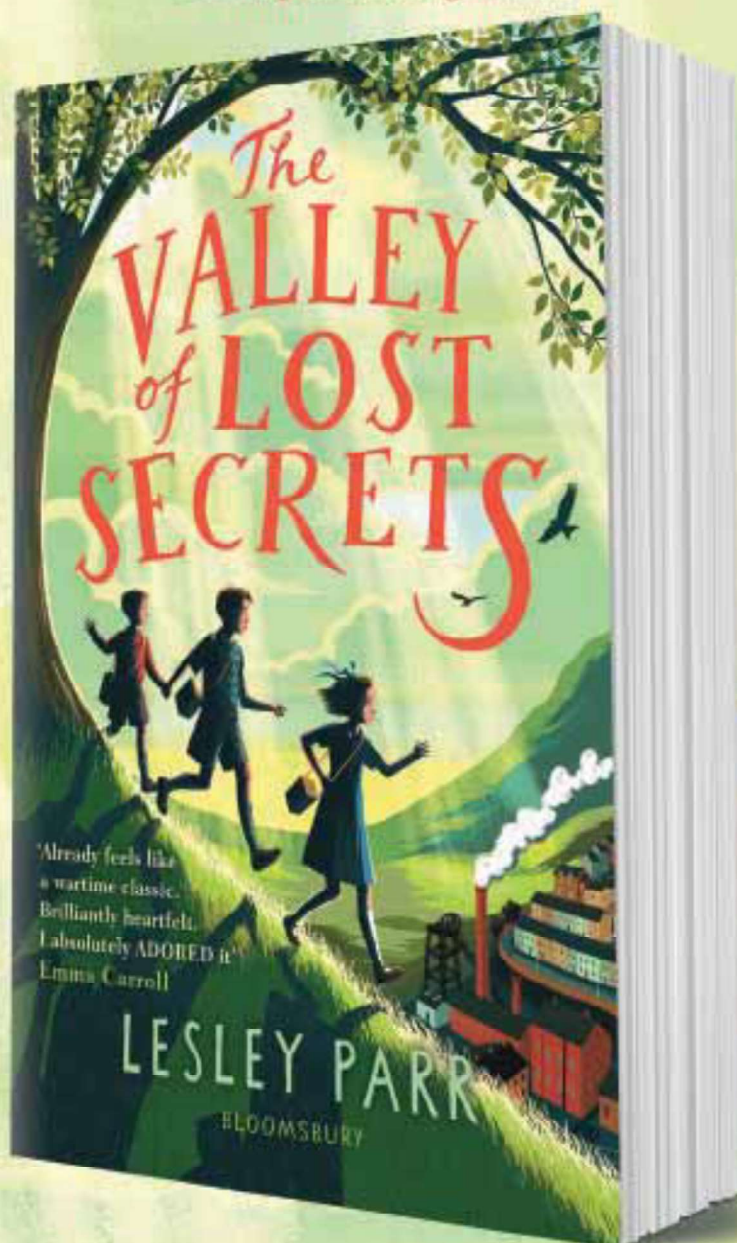
An ice-cream making machine from 1880

'With echoes of *Carrie's War* and *Goodnight Mister Tom* ... Quietly brutal and brilliantly heartfelt. I absolutely **ADORED** it'

**Emma Carroll**, author of  
*Letters from the Lighthouse*

'Evocative and heartfelt ... it's gripping, heartbreaking and yet full of hope'  
**Liz Hyder**, author of  
*Bearmouth*

'The Welsh backdrop and Jimmy's journey to acceptance stayed in my heart long after I'd closed the book'  
**Nizrana Farook**, author of  
*The Girl Who Stole an Elephant*



'An evacuee story with all the makings of a classic'  
**Anna Fargher**, author of  
*The Umbrella Mouse*

'A gripping mystery, overflowing with heart ... one of the very best books I've read this year'  
**Carlie Sorosiak**, author of  
*I, Cosmo*

'A brilliant debut'  
**Ross Montgomery**, author of  
*The Midnight Guardians*

**A mesmerising mystery about bravery and brotherhood. Perfect for fans of Emma Carroll, Michael Morpurgo and *Goodnight Mr Tom*.**

BLOOMSBURY

Waterstones **Children's**

**Book** of the *Month*