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Opening extract from

Tony Robinson's Weird World of Wonders: Pets

Written by

Tony Robinson

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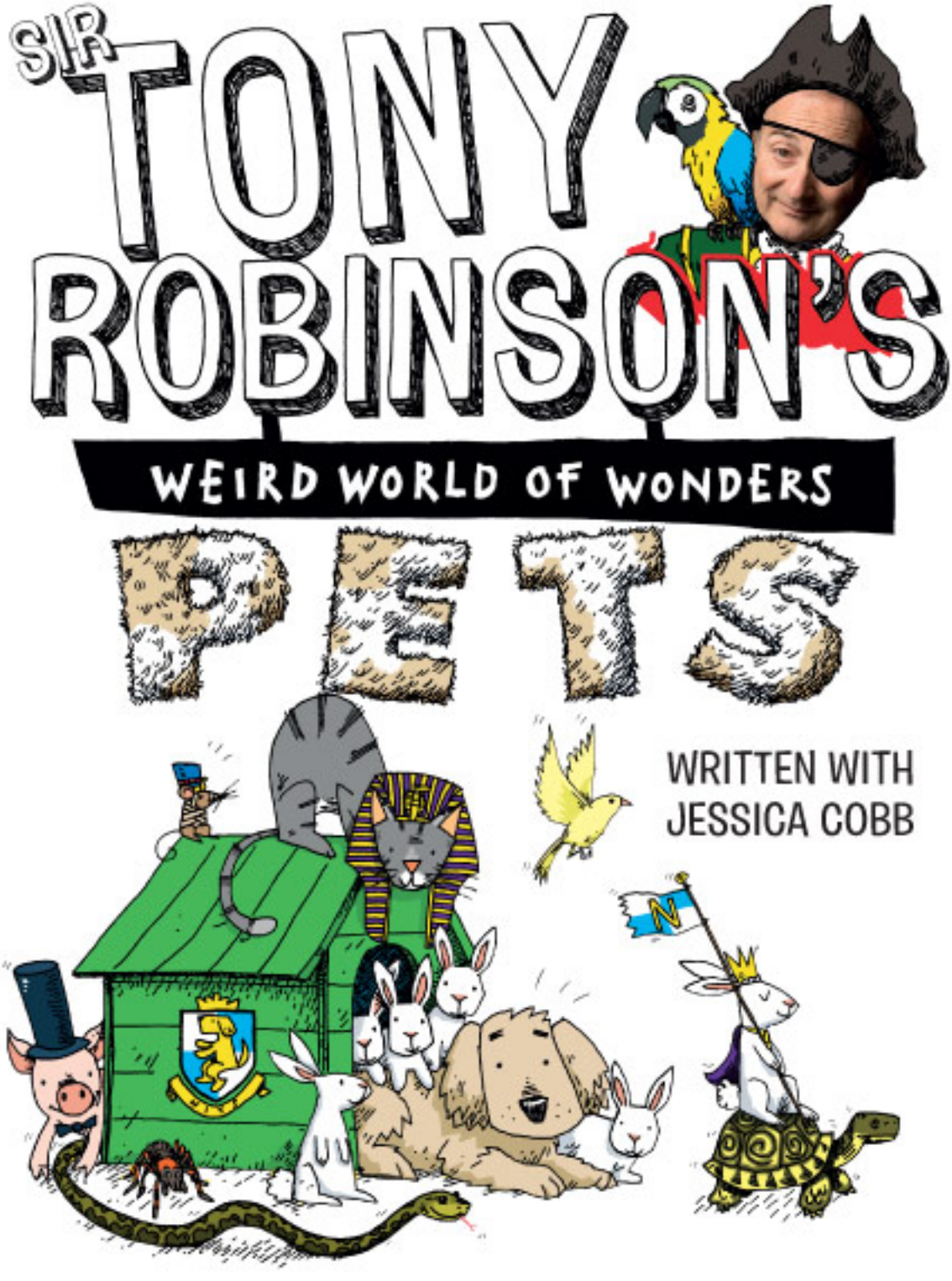
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SIR TONY ROBINSON'S WEIRD WORLD OF WONDERS

PETS



WRITTEN WITH JESSICA COBB

Illustrated by Del Thorpe

MACMILLAN CHILDREN'S BOOKS

Hello, we're the Curiosity Crew. You'll probably spot us hanging about in this book checking stuff out.

It's about the dog with the longest tongue ever, goldfish who play football, and people who keep hippos as pets.

It's also about a cat who made an entire species extinct, a tortoise who lived to be 250 years old and plenty more besides.

Read on to find out . . .



Nits



But where did they come from? How smart are they, and what on earth are they for?

CUDDLY WOLVES

Let's start at the beginning with man's oldest and best friend – the dog.



There were over 400 million dogs at the last count.

The reason experts think they're among the very earliest pets is because their remains have been found buried alongside human beings in graves which are thousands of years old.

But dogs haven't always existed. Their story begins 30,000 years ago, deep in the Stone Age, when grey wolves were looking for something juicy to eat, and started sniffing around the places where early humans lived.

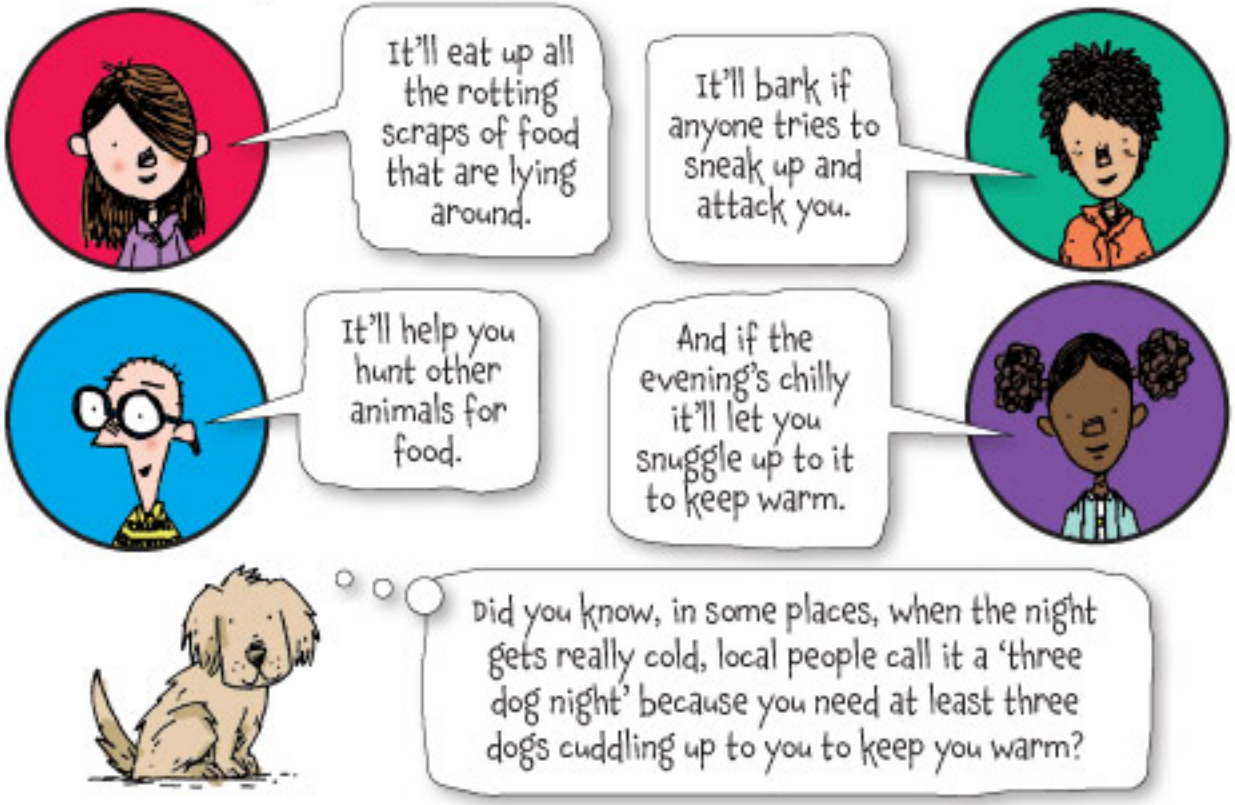


IMAGINE YOU'RE A HUNGRY WOLF, AND YOU SNEAK INTO A HUMAN CAMP LOOKING FOR A SMALL CHILD TO NIBBLE.

BUT THEN YOU FEEL THE HEAT FROM THE FIRE, AND SMELL SOMETHING COOKING, MAYBE SOME MAMMOTH STEW OR A TIGER KEBAB, SO YOU DECIDE TO STOP EATING CHILDREN, AND INSTEAD YOU SIT DOWN, OPEN YOUR EYES WIDE, LOOK REALLY CUTE AND FRIENDLY, AND HOPE YOU'LL BE THROWN A BONE OR TWO.

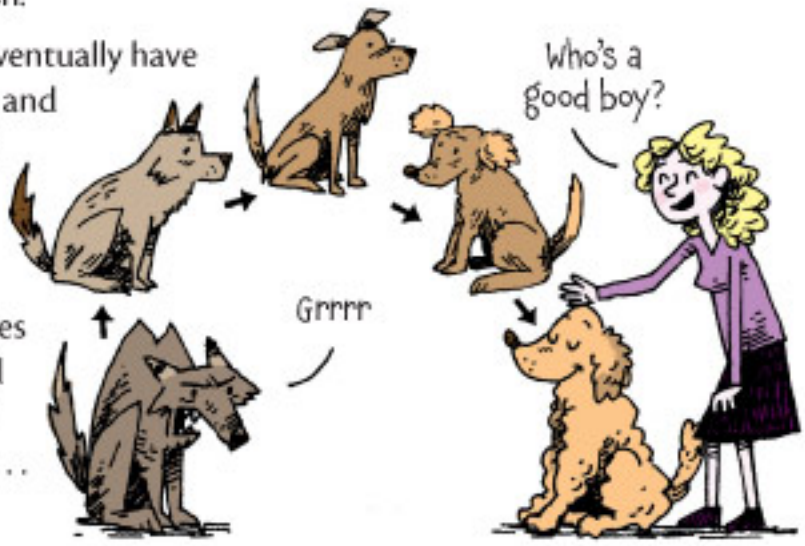
Nice idea. But why didn't the humans chase the wolves away?

Simple – a friendly wolf can be very useful.



Obviously you didn't just snuggle up to any old wolf, not unless you wanted to wake up with no nose. Only the best behaved wolves would have been allowed to hang around the campfire. The ones that ate people would have found themselves turned into wolfskin rugs pretty sharpish.

But the friendly wolves would eventually have had puppies, and the friendliest and most trainable of those puppies would have been looked after by the humans, and this would have happened time after time until the gentler wolves had completely replaced the old kind around the camp and had become a new kind of creature . . . a creature we call the dog.



This process is known as . . .

EVOLUTION



WHY BEARS TURNED WHITE

Most animals change over time to help them survive in a particular environment.

For example, millions of years ago in the frozen Arctic, bears born with white fur lived for longer, and survived better, than those with brown fur, because their whiteness helped them sneak up on nice, juicy, mouthwatering seals without being noticed. These successful white bears gave birth to other white bears, the brown bears either died out or moved away and eventually all the bears in the Arctic became white 'polar bears'!



