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## The Rare Dolphin

We don't always think of dolphins as being a rare species; however, the Chinese River Dolphin is considered by scientists to be the rarest of all marine mammals, to the point of possibly being extinct.

This rare dolphin makes its home in the freshwater of the Yangtze River. Its low dorsal fin and light color have given it the alternate name of "white-flag dolphin." As with other species of river dolphins, it originally came from the ocean.

Decreasing numbers have made this species of dolphin difficult to research and study. The dolphins are shy and do not expose much of themselves when surfacing for air. They feed mostly on freshwater fish. Due to the murky waters of the Yangtze, they rely on sound for feeding, orientation, and communication. Based on studies of similar species, scientists think the Chinese River Dolphin uses two main types of sounds: clicks and whistles. They use the clicks for navigation and identifying prey. Whistles are used for communication.

Currently, its habitat is limited to the Yangtze River in China. Habitat loss due to development along the river has further reduced its range. River development includes the construction of dams and other water management devices along the river. This affects the dolphins' movements within the river ecosystem. Fish resources have also declined.

Reserves have been established for the preservation of the species. However, these attempts do not prevent accidental deaths. Little, if any, effort has been made to breed the dolphins in captivity.

A survey team conducted an extensive study in 2006 using visual and acoustic measures. They failed to locate any individual animals within the species' range. The National Marine Fisheries Service has concluded that the Chinese River Dolphin may now be extinct.

### Text Questions

1. Which of the following threats to Chinese River Dolphins is specifically mentioned in the passage?
  - a. river development
  - b. entanglement in fishing gear
  - c. pollution
  - d. underwater explosions
2. Which is a synonym for the word *declined* as it is used in the text?
  - a. settled
  - b. rejected
  - c. decreased
  - d. failed
3. Which statement from the text provides the best explanation for why scientists have difficulty researching the Chinese River Dolphin?
  - a. Habitat loss due to development along the river has further reduced its range.
  - b. The dolphins are shy and do not expose much of themselves when surfacing for air.
  - c. Due to the murky waters of the Yangtze, they rely on sound for feeding, orientation, and communication.
  - d. They use the clicks for navigation and to identify prey.
4. What is the probable current status of the Chinese River Dolphin?
  - a. common
  - b. threatened
  - c. endangered
  - d. extinct
5. How might the extinction of this species of river dolphin affect people?  
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Name \_\_\_\_\_

## Blue Dragons

Do dragons exist today? Although often dismissed as a mythical creature, we actually live among several different types of “dragons.” For example, you may have seen a dragonfly hovering in a summer garden or read about a Komodo dragon lizard. The ocean has its share of dragons, too.

The blue dragon is a marine snail without a shell. It is commonly known as a blue sea slug. This particular species of marine snail can swallow a bubble of air (which it holds in its stomach) that enables it to float upside down on the surface of the ocean. The underside of the slug is blue, and its back is a grayish color. This helps to conceal it from birds flying overhead and from fish swimming below.

Blue dragons feed on poisonous man-of-war jellyfish and other similar species. When food is scarce, they will eat each other. They collect toxins from the jellyfish and store it in many finger-like structures. This ability to store poison gives them a much stronger sting than the jellyfish itself. They use this poison as a defense against predators. The sting can also be felt by people.

These creatures are rarely visible for study and observation except for when they approach land during times of onshore winds. They have been sighted in Hawaii and in tropical waters around the world. Beware of the blue dragon’s sting!

### Text Questions

1. What is the purpose of the first paragraph?
  - a. to give details about the topic
  - b. to introduce the subject
  - c. to introduce the author
  - d. to give examples of mythical monsters
2. What is the blue dragon’s main defense against predators?
  - a. It floats upside down in the water.
  - b. It stores poison and stings predators.
  - c. It feeds on poisonous jellyfish.
  - d. It moves to coastal waters during times of onshore winds.
3. What does the word *conceal* mean as it is used in the text?
  - a. discover
  - b. reveal
  - c. protect
  - d. hide
4. How does the coloring of the blue sea slug provide camouflage?
  - a. It floats right side up so the blue faces down in the water.
  - b. Its blue coloring makes it blend in with ocean waves.
  - c. The blue blends in with the ocean as seen from above, and the gray blends in with the ocean as seen from below.
  - d. It squirts blue poison into the water to conceal it from predators.
5. Why do you think this animal has the word *dragon* as part of its name?  
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**Pippi**

Pippi, a golden retriever and Labrador retriever mix, lives a life of purpose. Her meticulous training is called into action daily by Micah Nash and his parents, Andy and Heather Nash.

On one particular day, Micah dropped to the floor and stared at the ceiling of a small grocery store in Missouri. Heather commanded Pippi to “nudge.” Immediately, Pippi used her nose to remind Micah to stand up and resume his position at her side. Micah laughed as he got up and again grasped his part of Pippi’s leash.

Why is a dog in a grocery store? Pippi is not a pet dog. She is a skilled companion dog, trained by Canine Companions for Independence. Her job is to assist Micah in dealing with his autism. She wears a blue and gold vest proclaiming her status as a service dog whenever she is in public.

People often ask to pet her. Pippi is trained to take the attention in stride, responding promptly to Heather’s commands. Heather answers most questions now, but

in the future, Micah will be given more opportunities to interact verbally with the people around him.

One of Pippi’s duties is to accompany Micah to restaurants. She curls into a ball under his table, ready to help Micah focus on the world around him. At the command “visit,” she will lay her head in Micah’s lap. This grounds him in the reality of the present.

During every family outing, Micah will increase his hard-earned verbal skills by giving Pippi commands, such as “sit” and “down.” But Pippi’s job doesn’t end when the family goes home. Over time, Micah will become more responsible for Pippi’s care. This will help him expand his conversation skills with peers and family.

When Pippi is “off duty,” Micah and his brother chase her wildly through the house. And Pippi, released from her duties, behaves like any dog loved by two rambunctious boys.

**Text Questions** .....

1. What does it mean to say that Micah will *resume* his position at Pippi’s side?
  - a. He will start walking again.
  - b. He will take his place next to her again.
  - c. He will summarize what he is supposed to say to her.
  - d. He will continue to lie on the floor.
2. What is the theme or moral of the text?
  - a. how to train a Labrador retriever
  - b. what it is like to have autism
  - c. why service dogs are allowed in public places
  - d. how trained dogs can help people with autism
3. Which of the following is not a place where Pippi will likely be on duty for Micah?
  - a. in the car
  - b. at home
  - c. at the store
  - d. at a restaurant
4. Which statement from the text shows one way in which Pippi interacts with Micah?
  - a. Pippi lives a life of purpose.
  - b. Pippi uses her nose to remind Micah to stand up and resume his position at her side.
  - c. She wears a blue and gold vest proclaiming her status as a service dog whenever she is in public.
  - d. Pippi is trained to take the attention in stride, responding promptly to Heather’s commands.
5. Based on what you read, what is one part of his life in which Pippi will assist Micah?

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## Nature's Helicopters

Nature offers spectacular examples of “true flight.” This refers to the ability to lift and hover above the ground without forward motion to provide these forces. People have long been intrigued with the concept of vertical flight, and as we’ve observed the hummingbird and the dragonfly, we’ve been able to develop technology (such as the helicopter) that mimics their behavior. The hummingbird hawk-moth is another animal that has the same flight dynamics.

Although this moth gets the first part of its name from its flight patterns, it resembles a hummingbird in other ways as well. The moth has a long, straw-like mouth, which it uses to gather nectar from flowers. While hovering, it emits an audible humming noise. Its constant wing movement requires large amounts of food, similar to hummingbirds. Hummingbird hawk-moths keep track of flowers they have already visited. This conserves energy since the moth doesn’t return to empty flowers. The need for calories is so strong, they

may even feed while mating. As the second part of this animal’s name implies, it is a moth, not a bird. As an insect, it pollinates various garden flowers such as honeysuckle.

The hummingbird hawk-moth is native to warm climates. It makes its home in parts of Europe, North Africa, and Asia. It is a strong flier, particularly during the summer months. The moth does not tolerate cold weather well, and adults typically spend winter in crevices of rocks, trees, and buildings. Although in a different group, a similar moth known as a “bee moth” can be found in various parts of North America.

Hummingbird hawk-moths have good vision and are able to learn colors. The moth has the ability to fly during the day, at dawn and dusk, and even in the rain.

As we continue to study these unusual creatures, there is the potential for even more technological developments and benefits to humans.

### Text Questions

- According to the text, what characteristics are found in “true flight”?
  - The animal or craft flies in a straight line.
  - The animal or craft requires large amounts of fuel.
  - The animal or craft has the ability to lift and hover above the ground without forward motion to provide these forces.
  - The wings of the animal or craft move constantly.
- What does it mean to say the moth *emits* a humming noise?
  - It utters words.
  - It transmits a signal.
  - It puts into circulation.
  - It gives off sounds.
- Why do the moths require such large amounts of food?
  - Their wings are in near constant motion.
  - They do not tolerate cold weather well.
  - They migrate long distances in the winter.
  - They do not eat very much at one time because their mouths are small.
- What is the text structure in the second paragraph?
  - cause and effect
  - problem solution
  - descriptive
  - compare and contrast
- How has observing nature helped humans develop new technology?

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## The African Generuk

Giraffes aren't the only animals with long necks. The African generuk's name means "giraffe-necked" in the Somali language. They stand on their hind two legs and extend their necks to reach leaves on tall shrubs. They also use their front legs to pull down branches. This enables them to feed from bushes six to eight feet in height. The generuk's diet consists of leaves from thornbushes. They also eat buds, flowers, fruit, and climbing plants. They do not require water as they get all the moisture they need from their food.

The generuk has a small head with large eyes and ears. Males have stout, ringed horns. Related to gazelles, they have scent glands in front of their eyes and on their knees. They use the glands to mark territory.

Small groups of female generuks may live together with their young or with unattached males. Females range over a territory of one to two miles, traversing the

males' territory. Fawns are born in thickets apart from the group. The mother keeps the fawn hidden for a time. She leaves to feed but returns for nursing. The mother removes scents that would attract predators by cleaning or eating the fawn's waste.

One way that generuks warn others in the group of danger is by making a loud bleat. They communicate with their young with soft bleats. These antelopes make buzzing sounds when alarmed, and they may whistle when annoyed.

Predators of the generuk include lions, cheetahs, and leopards. Wild dogs and jackals also prey on generuks. Habitat loss and destruction threaten generuks. This makes it difficult for them to find food and shelter from predators. Conserving the thickets is one way to maintain the survival of this long-necked antelope.

### Text Questions

1. Which title would be a good alternative for this text?
  - a. "The Giraffe's Cousin"
  - b. "The Long-Necked Antelope"
  - c. "Leaf Eaters"
  - d. "Hidden Fawns"
2. What are two unusual features of this animal?
  - a. It eats leaves and has a small head.
  - b. It has natural predators and can whistle when annoyed.
  - c. It has a long neck and does not need water.
  - d. The mother cares for the young, and the males have horns.
3. What does the word *traversing* mean as it is used in the third paragraph?
  - a. opposing
  - b. surveying
  - c. turning
  - d. crossing
4. How would you summarize the fourth paragraph?
  - a. Generuks are very vocal.
  - b. Generuks warn group members when there is danger.
  - c. Generuks are silent animals.
  - d. Generuks communicate with their young.
5. What can we learn from studying animals with unusual characteristics?  
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