



Student competition: the search for the strangest species on Earth

Encourage your students to enter our writing competition – and see their work published.

Image courtesy of John Hann; image source: Flickr

By Eleanor Hayes

We know that evolution has come up with some bizarre adaptations to life on Earth. Carnivorous plants, stick insects and some seriously smelly mushrooms are just some of the more familiar examples. However, it is not only animals, plants and fungi that can amaze and delight us with their variety - if you look down the microscope, you might be astonished too.

In this competition, we invite you to do your own research – to investigate the weird and wonderful life on Earth and to choose the species you think is strangest.

What makes that species the strangest? Is it how it looks? What it eats? How it moves? Where it lives? How it reproduces? Can it perform amazing feats – dive deep, fly high, survive extreme conditions? Do you know *how* it can do these things? In your explanation, can you apply what you have learned in lessons other than biology? What physical principles is the organism exploiting? What chemical reactions?

A panel of scientists and science editors will judge the entries. If you can convince us that your choice really is the strangest organism on Earth, we'll publish your entry in

Science in School. For each of the three winning entries, a scientist working on that type of organism will write a short comment on the entry.

General rules

1. Entries are welcomed from students at primary or secondary schools (or other educational institutions with students up to the age of 19) anywhere in Europe.
2. There will be one winner for each category, according to the author's age on the date of submission: 4- to 10-year-olds, 11- to 15-year-olds, and 16 and over.
3. Entries may be submitted individually or by groups of students (only one entry per individual or group). Group entries will be judged in the category of the oldest group member.
4. In writing and *in your own words*, explain why you think this is the strangest organism on Earth.
5. Don't forget to include the scientific name (e.g. *Homo sapiens* or *Lucilia sericata*).

6. Only real species (living or extinct; animals, plants, fungi, micro-organisms or viruses) may be chosen. Mythical species (e.g. unicorns) or individual organisms (e.g. Paul the octopus) will not be considered.
7. Hand-written entries will not be accepted.
8. Include your name and date of birth, school address, and your teacher's name and contact details (postal and email addresses).
9. The deadline for submissions is 31 January 2017 (midnight CET).
10. Entries should be submitted electronically via the *Science in School* website: www.scienceinschool.org/2016/issue36/entry

Additional rules for students aged 11 and over

11. Maximum word count (excluding sources and image information): 750 words.
12. All written submissions must be in English.
13. At the end of your text, list *all* the sources of your information (websites, books, TV documentaries, your teacher, etc;

provide enough details for other people to find the sources).

14. Optionally, you may include *one* picture or video of the organism, in addition to the text.
 - a) You may want to draw, photograph or video the organism yourself, in which case you should state that it is your own work.
 - b) If you submit a picture or video you found elsewhere, specify exactly where you found it (e.g. Internet address or full reference, detailed enough for other people to find it).
 - c) If you submit a video, do *not* send the video file to us – just provide the web link to the video (e.g. uploaded on YouTube or available on another website). Videos should be no more than two minutes long.

may either submit the original picture or a photograph of it.

12. Maximum word count: 50 words.
13. Written submissions may be made in the language of instruction at your school.

Entries that do not comply with the rules will not be considered for the competition.



Additional rules for pupils aged 4–10

11. All entries must be accompanied by a picture of your chosen organism. You may use paints, pencils, pens, crayons, pasta, beans, fabric or other materials for your picture, but Photoshop and other computer software should not be used. You

Image courtesy of Bernard Dupont; image source: Flickr



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