

Live's Less Ordinary is the podcast from the BBC Wales Service, bringing you extraordinary personal stories from around the globe. Search for Live's Less Ordinary wherever you get your BBC podcasts.

You know we love an animal story on the happy pod, and this week we've got loads for you. Stand by for whales, cats, kangaroos, and Mickey Mouse.

Ah! Oh boy! Hiya pal, it's me, Mickey Mouse. Hey, Pluto!

This is Andrew Peach in London.

This is Danielle in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania, and you're listening to the happy pod.

Hello, I'm Carolina Costa, and I'm in Bogota, Colombia, and you're listening to the happy pod.

This is Andy High from Durango, Colorado, and you're listening to the happy pod.

On the way a new way of persuading children to try on glasses in Pennsylvania.

By the time they come to see me, they've been to the eye doctor, and maybe they've had drops in their eyes and all sorts of intrusive things, and so I hear I come at them trying to put something on their face, and they're like, no, get away.

In Kenya, innovation to offset climate change.

We are slowly learning how to deal with the droughts. I can only hope that the younger generation will pick up our egenis.

A hike through Sequoia National Park in California that could have broken a record.

Everyone that saw us on the hike was definitely intrigued by we had giant mallets sticking out of our packs.

And Nora, who's done a PhD in kangaroos.

Oh, I just love how social they are, and they're very cute, which doesn't hurt as well.

All on the way in the happy pod.

And we're going big to start our happy animal news with whales in Australia.

Researchers there have found that these marine mammals enjoy nothing more than swirling around in algae and seaweed.

Some even enjoy wearing it on their heads like a hat.

It's called kelping, as Jacob Evans found out from the man behind the study.

My opinion is that we should all be act like whales.

That's Dr Olaf Meinaker.

He's been studying whales for the best part of 15 years.

And now he's trying to figure out what they do to relax.

We have looked into why whales might interact with seaweed and do this kelping.

And it was very interesting to see that the animals seem to be doing this in different populations in the northern and in the southern hemisphere.

And the whale is basically actively seeking out that seaweed or the kelp and then placing it at different body parts.

And it can be an interaction that lasts for 30 minutes or even longer.

And there's one spot in particular that the whales fancy.

So we have got evidence of at least three or four different species, and it seems all have a preference to place it on their head.

There could be a simple explanation for that is because all of these bailing whales also have a sensory system that is made out of fine hairs on their head and maybe by touching

that seaweed, it does give a nice sensation.

And what we found, particularly for humpback whales, is that there are sometimes also throw it into the air, but a lot of times there are rolling and trying to use the hat to swim through it.

But they're not just putting the kelp on their heads.

The whales were actually taking the seaweed into their mouths and swimming down into the water column was it, and then releasing it again.

And for me, that is a very interesting behavior for a bailing whale, they don't have teeth, you don't bite, you filter.

And so taking it into the mouths, one good reason for that could be it actually is a bit like a toothbrush, because that part, those lips and that part of their mouths would be extremely difficult to clean.

And there is certainly organisms that like to settle there.

Maybe it's just a play, but could also be quite meaningful.

Whales are very intelligent, very sentient creatures, and they can also be rather friendly. Something can actually happen as a social activity, and that is something that fascinated me to see three individuals sharing kelp with each other.

And it was all of them rolling through this kelp, and then one piece went over to the other individual and another piece to the next individual.

And then another two whales actually came by and checked out the scenery, and it was just clear that this kind of interaction with the seaweed was a positive one that was happily shared with other individuals.

Dr. Meinke's team at Griffith University in Queensland have called the discovery a global phenomenon and have been inundated with messages from people across the world who say they've seen this exact same behavior.

I had some fantastic responses, and of course, in particular in times of a lot of sad news, people are really happy to learn about whales playing with kelp.

So next time you scratch your head or clean your teeth, just remember, a whale may be trying to do the same.

From whales to cats, and a 14-year-old feline has broken the Guinness World Record for the loudest per from the comfort of her favourite cushion.

Bella from Cambridgeshire in the UK achieved a per measuring 54.6 decibels.

That's the equivalent of the volume of a boiling kettle.

Wow, that is quite a per, isn't it?

In the United States, here's another cat making an impact.

At an eye clinic in the US, they found a new way to get children to try on glasses.

And that way is truffles, I spoke to her owner, Danielle Kroll, in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania.

Truffles is an extremely fluffy black and white tuxedo cat.

She was a stray.

Her mom was a stray cat with just really short, torty colour hair, but she turned out with this big fluffy black and white tuxedo.

She's super cute.

Now, tell me how you first discovered that truffles doesn't mind wearing glasses.

How did she ever come to put a pair of glasses on in the first place?

When I got truffles, she was about 12 weeks old, and she was super smart.
And I just kind of had this crazy idea.
I wondered if she would put glasses on for me.
I have a children's optical shop, and we fit kids with glasses of all ages starting from infants on up.
And probably the most difficult age is like that two to four, where they're really unsure about what's happening.
And I thought, well, I wonder if truffles would put glasses on, and I could show them that it's okay.
And so I made a pair of glasses, similarly that I would make for an infant, because she was right in that size.
And then I just taught her how to take them off, and it just seemed she really took to it very quickly, and she really does love wearing them.
And like I said, she can take them off, but often I'll put them on for demonstration, and then I'll be like, oh, you could take them off.
And she walks away and is like, no, I want to keep them on.
And I can imagine for the children of the age you're talking about, young children who need glasses.
Actually, I need glasses.
I've owned them since the age of four every day of my life.
I feel really weird without them.
But it's a bit of a sort of strange idea for a young child to have to put glasses on for the first time, especially when they see that other children of their age don't tend to be wearing them.
Absolutely.
And I think, you know, by the time they come to see me, they've been to the eye doctor and maybe had drops in their eyes and all sorts of intrusive things.
And so I hear I come at them trying to put something on their face and they're like, no, get away.
And now truffles is she's like a charm.
She'll put the glasses on and the little kid, I was like, oh, OK, and then we're like, now it's your turn.
And then they put them right on and they just relate to her so quickly.
I was really surprised by that and very pleased, of course.
Tell me about color blindness because you've got some special glasses for truffles that mean that she can distinguish colors better and she likes those even more.
I wanted to bring some awareness to color blindness in kids about one in 12 boys are colorblind about one in 300 girls are colorblind.
And I wanted to bring some awareness and I just thought, well, you know what?
I'm going to make truffles color blindness glasses and just see what happens with her.
I know cats do have color deficiency.
So I made the glasses and when I filmed it, it was just like I have no idea how her reaction is going to be.
But when I put them on her, she just sat up so quickly and she looked around and I'm

not sure there's no way for me to say 100 percent that she sees color out of them.

But she really does love how she sees out of them.

She definitely sees differently.

They quickly became her favorite pair of glasses.

And to the point of, you know, when I try to take them off, she definitely does not want me to take them off.

She like pushes my hand away and is like, no, no, no.

So truffles has a job as an optometrist and she's also now a social media star.

What next for her?

She also has a nonprofit organization called the truffles the kitty organization.

And that allows her to help kids and encourage kids to wear glasses or eye patches or kids that are going through surgeries.

And so she's very busy being the chairperson of her organization.

Thanks to Danielle and to truffles.

He sat and watched that whole conversation on zoom kangaroos next and a new theory about how they get on with each other.

PhD student Nora Campbell has identified new patterns of behavior that have never been seen before.

She's been talking to Jackie.

Well, we had a long data set six years.

And so with all of that information, we really could have looked for anything.

But because we were able to identify them individually, we thought it might be really interesting to look at how each individual kangaroo is behaving and how their social networks were changing throughout the years.

We found two really big things.

The first was that females with young actually had a much higher sociality than females without young, which was quite different to previous studies, which has shown that females tend to isolate themselves when they have joeys.

And the second really interesting thing we found was potential evidence for long term relationships in kangaroos, which is the first we've ever seen in macro pods, which is really exciting.

So what you're saying is that that mums have mates?

Yeah, I suppose so.

It certainly seems that way.

You're still finding things that surprise you.

We are still finding things to surprise us about kangaroos.

Oh, absolutely.

I mean, kangaroos have been studied for centuries by indigenous Australians and then for a much smaller amount of time by European Australians.

But as technology advances and as we sort of learn to look at things closer, we're always able to see a little bit more, which is one of my favorite things about science.

There's always more to discover.

If you have an animal story or the listeners need to hear, globalpodcast.bvc.co.uk.

Moving out to Kenya, where Maasai leaders are experimenting with new ways of tackling

climate change.

For the last two and a half years, a severe drought has gripped the Horn of Africa, causing starvation among families who rely on livestock.

One community is using a simple solution to re-green their land.

Sophie Estor reports.

Our land is so hot, it's practically ashes.

In this dusty and dry corner of southern Kenya, people are experiencing the worst drought in 40 years.

The land, close to the border with Tanzania, is brown, brittle and baked.

The livestock are dead because of the drought.

Olesonko is a Maasai cattle herder.

He's one of 23 million people facing starvation across Ethiopia, Somalia and Kenya.

I had 400 livestock and 300 are dead.

Only God can help me recover from such a big loss.

This was the only source of livelihood for my family.

But there is hope.

As you look across the landscape, in some fields you notice something strange.

Little half-circles or half-moons of green, like icebergs in an ocean, they are splashes of colour in a brown sea.

These are our solution, half-moons.

Lenoy Matekine is a young Maasai leader, but she's also a conservationist.

They are designed as small dams with a depth of half a metre each that captures rainwater which seeps into the soil.

Once the half-moons are receded with native grass peaches, vast amount of land starts to re-green.

Her tribe have been working with an NGO called Just Dig It since 2016.

Since then, they've restored 3,000 hectares of land, that's 6,000 football pitches.

Lenaya is a digging supervisor.

The first time we started, people didn't believe there would be grass, but as we have progressed over time, the community has really seen that this is something that is working.

Now these half-moons have proven to work, it's hoped that the next generation will continue to find innovative ways to deal with the impact of climate change.

We are slowly learning how to deal with the droughts.

I can only hope that the younger generation will pick up our iguanas.

They can see that these half-moons are a simple solution to serve our land.

You can hear more stories like that on the climate question, which is available wherever you get your BBC podcasts.

Still to come in the happy pod, 100 years of Disney with Paula, the Disney historian.

He felt that if he put the best efforts into making it the best possible thing it could be to take it to the next level, that it would appeal to people.

One of all the things to do at the top of a mountain in California.

What made Andy think of playing croquet?

Unexpected Elements is the podcast exploring the science behind the headlines.

Each week we take a news story you've probably heard of and use the science surrounding it

as a springboard to dive into other stories that may not be on your radar.

Unexpected Elements from the BBC World Service.

Find it wherever you get your BBC podcasts.

We love it when you get in touch to tell us what makes you happy.

Global podcast at bbc.co.uk is our email address and Karen Acosta got in touch from Bogota in Colombia.

Well I listen to you pretty much every day and then you started doing the happy pods which are really a great relief and you had requested like people sending happy things and we've been especially happy this year because we've been able to form our orchestra which we've been dreaming of for a long time and I thought oh now that is something that really does make me smile and you had requested something that makes you smile in the morning and I thought it makes me smile and I'm sure it'll make other people smile too.

We love happy stories and this is part of an organisation that you run in Bogota.

Tell me a bit about that.

What does the organisation do for young people there?

Well it started 21 years ago.

Initially it was something that we started to help internally displaced refugees from conflict zones around the country and there are big settlements of these internally displaced people in Bogota.

We thought there must be something that we can do to help and the community said that they needed a place where they could leave their children safely whilst they went to work.

And it's interesting that you've developed it beyond providing what you might call quite basic things for these young people displaced by the civil war into cultural things, things that are enriching the music, the arts, theatre, all those kind of things that of course young people need as well for a joyous life.

That became sort of like a gradual thing.

We began to do like okay so they need help with their homework and okay but after they do their homework what else?

Do you remember someone suggesting the orchestra for the first time?

There was a school in Bogota that helps us and they had their own fabulous orchestra and they were competing and I remember saying oh gosh I would love that and the headmaster of the school said okay well let's see what we can do and he helped me get some teachers and yeah and then eventually he formed it this year but gradually you know people donating their instruments.

It's fabulous, they learn discipline and well they say it's terribly good for maths so I'm waiting to see the results of that but yes it's teamwork, it's also self-expression so being able to take the instruments home and practicing and even performing you know as a group with their classmates that was just very good for them.

To hear the children of Bogota.

As long ago as the 14th century people in northern France were amusing themselves by using mallets to knock balls through hoops made of willow branches although it was in Ireland where croquet became really popular.

It's usually played on grass rather than at the top of a mountain but my next guest had

other ideas and he and his friends were on a week-long hike through California's beautiful Sequoia National Park finishing at the summit of Mount Whitney the highest peak in the United States outside Alaska and once they got to 14 and a half thousand feet they played croquet but have they set a new world record?

So when we're backpacking everybody carries their own mallet they carry their own ball and we backpacked this trip for seven days so everyone that saw us on the hike was definitely intrigued why we had giant mallets sticking out of our packs but the hike was quite lovely we started on the west side in Sequoia National Park and then we headed east across the Sierra mountain range and the last day we ended on Mount Whitney.

The night before we slept at 13,500 feet so that we could summit during the sunrise which was beautiful but it was probably 20 degrees when we got to the top and we really wanted to play croquet up there which was a challenge to say the least.

So at what point in the expedition did someone say why don't we play croquet at the top of the mountain?

I think my friend Ryan had it in his mind the entire time that we had to because we were bringing the croquet with us and why not play at the highest elevation we've all ever been to so we figured we'd at least attempt it.

Is there a flat enough surface I suppose there must be?

As you can imagine there isn't a good croquet surface up there.

The top is somewhat flat and undulating but it's all rock there's no soft ground or anything so we were just wedging wickets between rocks and just trying to make a course work but prefer to play with softer ground for sure.

But perfect for Instagram, YouTube and as it turns out a world record.

Yes hopefully we still need to submit with the Guinness book but I believe that it is a record.

I haven't been able to find anything in regard to the highest elevation croquet match previous to this.

So there's a chance that someone out in the Himalayas or something has outperformed us but to my knowledge that has not occurred and the concern is that we won't meet the criteria because we didn't film the whole event we only filmed part of the event so I'm not sure how strict they actually are.

I think in my experience we've talked a lot about world records on the happy pod they are quite strict I'm getting worried now that maybe it'll be a sort of unofficial achievement but not one that they recognize I hope not.

Well that's okay it was an achievement for us regardless of whether or not it's in the record book officially.

You could always go again.

We could.

I would love to do that hike again but man it would be a challenge.

Now a hundred years ago Walt Disney created the Walt Disney Company and this famous film studio went on to create universes that mark the childhoods of millions around the world.

Creating characters like Mickey Mouse, Cinderella and Elsa.

These films were pioneering in animation as well as sound.

Paula Sigmund Lowry is the curator of the Disney 100 exhibition which is touring the

world for the next five years.

It was actually very exciting because of course I grew up as did many Americans watching Walt Disney on television.

I would go to Disneyland with my family once a year and the excitement about going to that park was so great you could barely sleep the night before.

So I grew up with Disney, I grew up with the Mickey Mouse Club and the films and the characters brought a great deal of joy into my life and I actually trained to be a children's librarian to be a storyteller to engage children's imaginations and learning from books and stories.

And just as I was graduating from library school the Walt Disney Company had founded its archives five years earlier in 1970 and I got a call from the dean of the library school saying they're looking for someone who knows how to do research and I know you have an interest in Disney I think this might be a good fit.

If we're trying to nail down what's so special I mean certainly technically innovative as I was saying but also it always seems to me that everything that the Disney Company does is of such high quality that can make it expensive for people to access but the characters the storytelling the sound the production values are always so high.

Well that was Walt Disney's determination to provide the highest quality to elevate the art of what he was doing and he felt that if he put the best efforts into making it the best possible thing it could be to take it to the next level that it would appeal to people and eventually the money would come back to him.

And from Paula the Disney historian to someone else with a unique job Brett Eyewinners from Pasadena California Brett is the voice of Mickey Mouse he spoke to Iona Hampson.

I was simply a Disney fan who was fascinated by Walt Disney and his story and I loved Mickey Mouse

as such I kind of listened to Disney records and Disney soundtracks a lot

when I was drawing the characters and I would start talking like Mickey Mouse just for fun you know oh boy a few friends started recognizing that it sounded kind of similar to Mickey Mouse so they encouraged me to keep doing it and then eventually I just did it for a good laugh you know give everyone a chuckle once in a while well a friend of mine from college actually ended up at Pixar Animation Studios and she received an internal email that was being circulated outlining an audition process they were looking for an understudy for the voice of Mickey at the time it was Wayne Allwine he had done it for 32 years and so she sent it on to me she said you have to do this and I thought well I've never been a voice actor I never planned on being an actor in any capacity but I love Mickey so much and this would be an amazing job and honor to have so I threw it out to the universe and I took a stab sent in my audition and the rest is kind of history and when it comes to being the official voice what does that mean well you know Disney has prided themselves for so long in consistency of character especially if you're at Disneyland or if you're watching Mickey on TV you hear Mickey the way you remember him to sound I've worked on

things from theme parks to video games toys radio projects albums TV shows obviously things I've forgotten interactive there's the list goes on and on and on but every job is so exciting and every job requires a little different Mickey hat as it were but yeah it just it means it's you know being the official voice of Mickey Mouse means that there's a lot of work because Mickey works a lot at the beginning of the day when you have a cup of coffee or something like that how do you start

and go okay let's warm up and let's get ready to be Mickey yeah that's a great question it's probably something different well in the morning I'll start with a simple ah and then I know that I if I can do that scale I know I can do it and then I'll start with a oh boy hi a pal it's me Mickey Mouse if I can do that then I'm usually good and occasionally I'll yell at Pluto hey Pluto that's amazing is there anything that you're aware of in terms of like the interaction or the way that Mickey's perceived in different places in the world I I tend to think that Mickey's loved worldwide and I think that is his power you know I've been saying a lot lately that Mickey really reflects something in all of us we identify with him and and we all usually have our own memories that are tied to that I just recently was able to visit Disneyland Paris for the first time my first time in France actually and it was so eye-opening to see Mickey being received in a different country and you know it just I've I've had a very narrow-minded viewpoint being over in the States and only seeing Mickey on our TV shows and our theme parks so to go even just a short hop across the pond to France and see how loved and adored he is there just kind of open my eyes to Mickey is universal in a way his goodness his likability his kindness it's just it kind of transcends all cultures and I think that's his power

Brett Eyewan the voice of Mickey Mouse

and that's all from us for now thanks to Olaf, Danielle, Nora, Caroline, Paula and Brett for talking to us this week don't forget if there's a story from your part of the world that will make everyone happy we really want to hear it the email address is globalpodcast.bbc.co.uk or on X formally Twitter we are at global news pod this edition was mixed by Chris Lovelock the producers were Anna Murphy and Jacob Evans the editor is Karen Martin my name is Andrew Peach thanks for listening the happy pod is back next week