



The

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DOGGY CARE

How many species of bandicoots do you know?

Are Maremma dogs good suburban pets?

Did you know foxes use their tail as a 'signal flag'?



UNLIKELY ALLIES: Maremma guardian dogs are protecting eastern barred bandicoots, as scientists endeavour to reintroduce the little marsupials to their natural environment in Victoria.

Picture: iStock/ Ribeirodos Santos

Bandicoot's new best friend

WHAT do bandicoots, dogs, foxes and sheep have in common?

Well it might sound like a bad dad joke, but the answer to this question is more interesting than you might expect.

It starts with the eastern barred bandicoot, the shy, little marsupial which is endemic to Tasmania and south-western Victoria.

The Tasmanian and mainland populations are actually recognised as two distinct subspecies, and the mainland subspecies is believed to be extinct in the wild.

The Tasmanian subspecies is doing better than its mainland relative, possibly because Tasmania is not home to the European red fox, or at least we don't think it is.

But eastern barred bandicoots are still



regarded as 'vulnerable' to extinction here, so we need to do our very best to look after them.

The Victorian subspecies currently survives only in captivity and in reintroduced populations, and that is where dogs come in.

Not just any dogs; we are talking a very special breed of guardian dogs - Maremmas.

In a collaborative research trial between Zoos Victoria and the University of Tasmania, eastern barred bandicoots have been released into reserves at two sites in western Victoria.

The areas are also home to flocks of sheep and guardian dogs.

The dogs have been specially trained to leave the bandicoots alone, but their natural instinct to protect the sheep will keep foxes away.

In other words, the sheep will be free to eat grass, the bandicoots will live in the grass, and the dogs will happily guard against foxes.

University of Tasmania ecologist, Professor Chris Johnson, and his former PhD student, Dr Linda von Bommel - an expert on the behaviour and management of Maremmas—

worked with a team at Zoos Victoria to develop the idea, and played a key role in monitoring trial sites.

"The project is running a large experiment - we are setting up Maremmas and sheep at several trial sites in Victoria, where we plan to release bandicoots." Professor Johnson said.

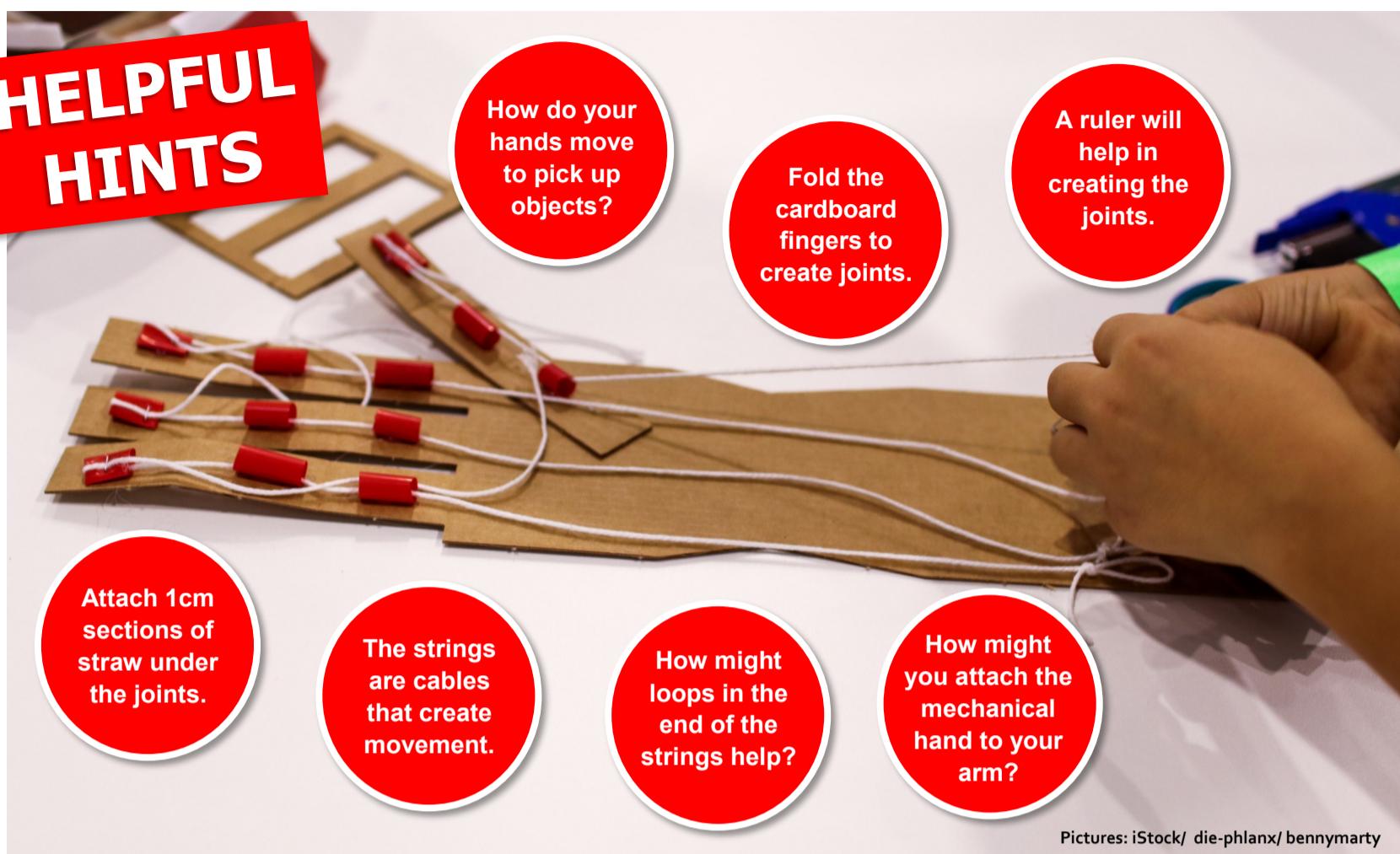
"The information is crucial, as we would not release bandicoots unless we were confident the Maremmas were having the desired effect on foxes."

You can read the full University of Tasmania, *Research to Reality* story here: www.utas.edu.au/news/2020/12/17/1103-guardian-dogs-provide-safe-haven-for-endangered-bandicoots/

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Try some handy work

HELPFUL HINTS



Pictures: iStock/ die-phlanx/ bennymarty

HAVE you ever tried to construct a mechanical hand?

It is not as difficult as you might think, and all you need is cardboard, plastic straws, string, sticky tape or a glue gun, a pen or pencil, scissors, a ruler, and elastic might also help, if you have some.

The picture, left, is only a guide, and there are lots of examples online.

As a starting point, we would suggest drawing around your hand and wrist on the cardboard, and cutting it out.

Then perhaps, cut out a second shape the length of your forearm and glue them together to create a sturdy structure you can attach to your own arm.

Children's University Tasmania members can earn stamps in their passports for this challenge, at the discretion of their school coordinator.

Bandicoot bodyguards to keep foxes at bay

From Page 1

Maremmas are a breed of guardian dog that originated in Italy, where they have been used for centuries to guard sheep from wolves.

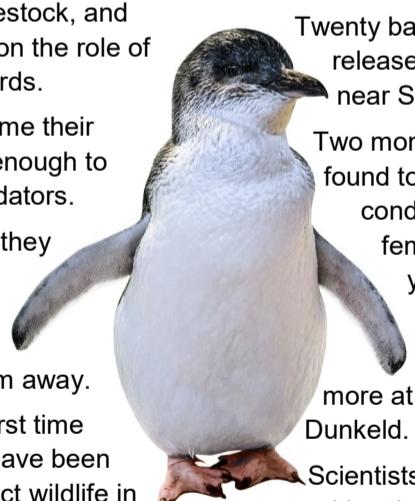
They are a large dog, with a thick white coat and a loud bark.

Unlike herding dogs, they form a bond with livestock, and happily take on the role of protecting herds.

Most of the time their presence is enough to scare off predators.

It is rare that they actually have to confront predators, or chase them away.

It is not the first time Maremmas have been used to protect wildlife in Australia.



The Zoos Victoria Guardian Dog Project follows the success of the Middle Island Maremma Project, which involved dogs being trained to protect penguins from foxes during breeding season.

The Maremmas do a wonderful job protecting the little penguin colony on Middle Island, near the Victorian coastal town of Warrnambool.

You can find out more here:

www.warrnamboolpenguins.com.au/meet-the-maremmas

This world-first project attracted international attention, and inspired the 2015 Australian film *Oddball*.

Perhaps you have seen it?

Anyway, the Maremmas are also doing a good job protecting the precious eastern barred bandicoots.

Twenty bandicoots were released at a reserve near Skipton last year.

Two months later 10 were found to be in good condition, and four females had pouch young.

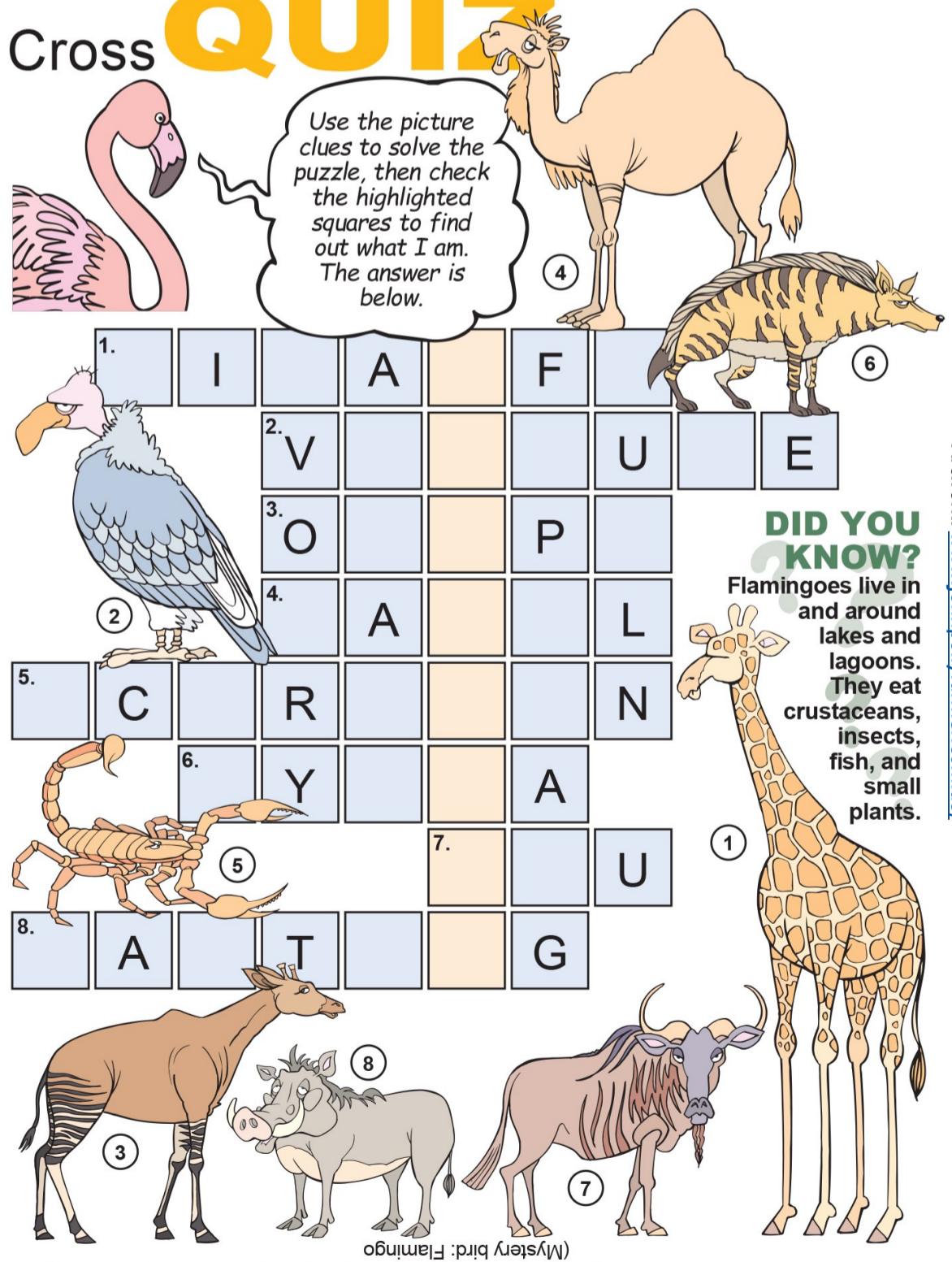
This encouraged the release of 20 more at a reserve in Dunkeld.

Scientists are closely tracking the movements of the bandicoots and the guardian dogs.

The 50-hectare Dunkeld reserve is equipped with 60 wildlife cameras, the two guardian dogs are fitted with GPS trackers, and the bandicoots are fitted with tiny radio transmitting which weigh about one gram.

Zoos Victoria Guardian Dog Coordinator David Williams said the trial's key measure of success would be the establishment of self-sustaining populations of bandicoots on the mainland.

Cross QUIZ



Artwork: www.johnpollyfarmer.com.au