



Summer
2026

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Key Stage 2
Curriculum

young vets club

WILD WONDERS

THE OLDEST LAND ANIMAL IN THE WORLD



BUMPER RESCUE STORIES

**FROM POORLY...
TO POWERFUL!**

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PET DIGESTION

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BECOMES FUEL**

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WILDLIFE HISTORY

ONE TORTOISE. TWO CENTURIES.

On a small island in the South Atlantic lives a giant tortoise who has been quietly watching the world change for nearly 200 years.

Before cars filled the roads... before planes crossed the sky... before any of us can even imagine, there was Jonathan.

He takes life exactly as it comes - slowly and steadily. Because Jonathan has something very special: time.

Jonathan lives on the island of St Helena, in a grassy enclosure known simply as "The Paddock". It sits just below the Governor's house, where he shares his home with three other giant tortoises.

Most days are slow and steady. Jonathan moves between patches of grass, rests in the shade, and enjoys the warmth of the sun. Sometimes, he might indulge in a mud bath, or paddle in the shallows of his very own pool.

But once a week, something special happens. Jonathan hears a familiar voice. His head lifts. He stretches forward, mouth open, ready. Because Jonathan doesn't eat alone. He's gently hand-fed by his vet, Joe, and a small, dedicated team.

At nearly 200 years old, Jonathan is almost completely blind, and his sense of smell isn't what it used to be. But his hearing is excellent, and he recognises Joe, and the sound of his favourite foods rolling around the yellow bucket, straight away. With careful guidance, and a little help, Jonathan enjoys a mix of fruit and vegetables.

His favourites include banana, carrot, and cabbage. Like all tortoises, Jonathan doesn't have teeth. Instead, he has a hard, sharp beak, perfect for snipping through tough plants.

TORTOISES DON'T HAVE TEETH!

Instead, they have a hard beak made of keratin. That's the same stuff as your fingernails and hair.

This tough, sharp surface helps them cut and chew plants.



Name:

Jonathan

Species:

Seychelles giant tortoise
(*Aldabrachelys gigantea hololissa*)



Home:

St Helena, South Atlantic Ocean

Age:

194 years old

Favourite food:

Bananas (and a good mix of fruit & veg!)



World record title:

The oldest living land animal

Special skills:

Recognising voices and living a very long time

Fun fact:

Gets hand-fed once a week by a dedicated team



Science fact:

His DNA is being studied to help cure cancer



Challenges:

Almost completely blind, has no sense of smell, but still happy

But as he got older, his beak became worn down and blunt, making it difficult for him to eat properly. With the right care and regular feeding, his beak has grown stronger again and so has he. It's a simple routine. But for Jonathan, it's everything.

Jonathan isn't just special because of his age (he's in the Guinness Book of Records as the oldest known living land animal in the world). Scientists are also very interested in him.

In fact, they are studying his DNA to understand how he has lived for so long. Giant tortoises like Jonathan are incredibly good at protecting their bodies from disease. Instead, they usually grow old slowly, with their bodies gradually wearing out over time. Understanding how their bodies do this could help humans too. Life isn't always easy for the old guy.



On St Helena, being a vet means far more than caring for pets.

Joe's work stretches across the entire island, from farms and homes to the coastline and beyond.

One day he might be treating goats or sheep. The next, checking on the four donkeys at the local sanctuary. And sometimes, he's called to help much larger animals like dolphins or even whales that have come ashore.

There's no big team of specialists to call on. Out here, Joe has to rely on his own knowledge, experience, and instincts.

"On an island like this, you have to be ready for anything."



A JOB FULL OF SURPRISES

Joe's work has included:

- helping stranded sea animals
- collecting DNA samples for scientists
- protecting bees from dangerous diseases
- working with seabirds on nearby islands

No two days are ever the same. And among all of these challenges, one of Joe's most important patients is also his oldest. Looking after Jonathan takes patience, care, and a deep understanding built over years. Here's wishing you many more happy birthdays to come, Jonathan!

Every case is different, and often unpredictable. Animals can't explain what's wrong, so vets have to become detectives. They look closely at how an animal moves, how it behaves, and even subtle changes that others might miss.

But it's not just about solving problems. It's about understanding the environment too.

On a small island, people and animals live much closer to nature. That means Joe's work also includes protecting wildlife, supporting conservation projects, and even helping keep local species safe from disease.

“He recognises my voice and starts biting the air, waiting for the food to land in his mouth. He can't see much, but he knows I'm there.”

THE ISLAND'S SUPER BEES

Did you know? St Helena is one of the few places in the world where bees are free from many of the diseases found in other countries. That's a big deal, because bee diseases can spread quickly and harm whole populations.

How are they protected? Joe helped create rules to stop harmful diseases from reaching the island. This includes:

- not allowing certain bee products to be brought in
- carefully checking anything that could carry infection

Why it matters. Healthy bees help:

- pollinate plants
- grow food
- keep the island's ecosystem thriving



WHAT CAN TORTOISES EAT?

GREEN: Everyday favourites

- dandelions (leaves AND flowers!) – one of the best foods
- leafy greens, certain lettuces, kale, cabbage
- weeds & grasses – they will forage themselves



AMBER: Sometimes

- carrots – healthy, but too much isn't ideal
- tomatoes – safe occasionally, but quite acidic
- cucumber – can cause tummy issues if overfed

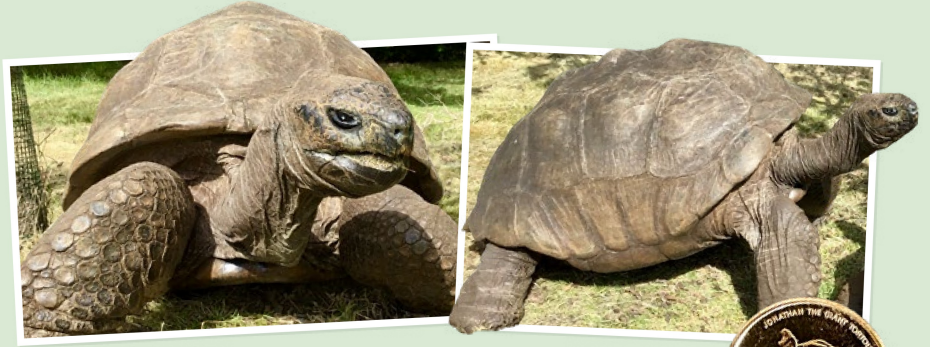


RED: Avoid these

- iceberg lettuce – doesn't hurt, but has almost no nutrients
- avocado – toxic to many animals, including tortoises
- bread or human food – their bodies aren't built for it
- Dairy – they can't digest it



TORTOISE THROUGH TIME



1831

Charles Darwin begins his voyage on the HMS Beagle.

He studies giant tortoises in the Galapagos and helps shape our understanding of evolution.



C. 1830–1835

Jonathan is born!
On an island in the Seychelles.



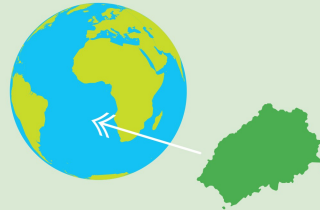
1840s

Giant Seychelles tortoises are thought to be extinct in the wild.
Hunting led many to believe they had disappeared.



1882

Jonathan arrives on St Helena.
He is already fully grown when he reaches the island.



1961

New giant tortoises arrive on St Helena.

Jonathan is no longer the only one in the paddock.



1939–1945

World War II
Another major global conflict during Jonathan's lifetime. His remote location means he stays safe.



1914–1918

World War I
A global conflict unfolds while Jonathan lives on quietly. Some animals played important roles like carrying messages and alerting to danger.

LATE 1880s

One of the earliest photos of Jonathan is taken. He becomes part of recorded history.



1977

Jane Goodall founds the Jane Goodall Institute. Protecting chimpanzees and inspiring wildlife conservation worldwide.

2003

Worldwide Veterinary Service is founded.
Helping animals and vets around the world.



2009

Joe the vet begins working on St Helena.
He starts caring for Jonathan.



2020s

Jonathan is confirmed as the oldest known living land animal.
He becomes a Guinness world record breaking tortoise.



2026

Jonathan is around 194 years old.
Still going strong and still making history!

MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE

If you could send a note to Jonathan, what would you say? Write it here! →

Dear Jonathan,

