



Suitable for
Ages 8+

Time
Required:
1 hour

Activity



Native or not?

Background

Many of the animals common in the UK today did not originate here. There are also many species that would have been common in the past but are now extinct here.

The introduction, spread of species and their extinction can tell archaeologists so many different things. Knowing when animal species arrived or became extinct can help archaeologists date sites. For example, if we think a site is Palaeolithic, but we find a domesticated cow leg, then we might have to rethink how we've dated the site!

You will need:

- pens/pencils,
- paper,
- activity sheet (pgs 2 & 3)



Activity:

In this activity you will guess (or you may know!), which animals are native to the British Isles.

1. Give everyone time to go through all the animals, deciding if they were originally native to the UK. Remember: Native means present naturally, not introduced by humans!
2. Go through the answers with the group. Were any of the answers surprising? Why or why not?
3. Thinking about these animals, why do you think people would choose to bring them to the UK? Were they all on purpose?





Do you think these animals have ever been native to the UK?



Rabbit

Yes No



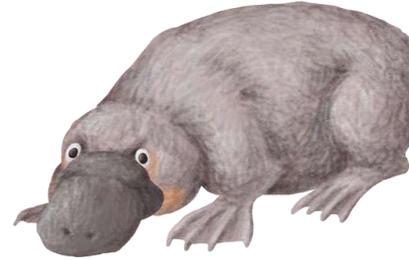
Brown Bear

Yes No



Woolly Mammoth

Yes No



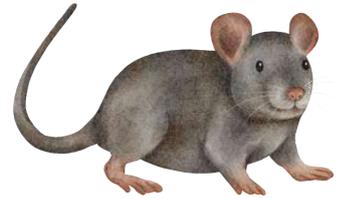
Platypus

Yes No



Wolf

Yes No



Beaver

Yes No

Rat

Yes No



Red deer

Yes No



Fox

Yes No

Remember: Native means present naturally, not introduced by humans!





Vole

Yes No

Raccoon

Yes No

Cave hyena

Yes No



Woolly rhino

Yes No

Hedgehog

Yes No



Giraffe

Yes No



Chicken

Yes No

Wild boar

Yes No



Guinea pig

Yes No



Sheep

Yes No





Answers:

Rabbits

Yes No

Introduced during the Norman period, native to southwestern Europe (Spain, Portugal, and western France).

Brown Bear

Yes No

Common throughout Europe after the Last Glacial Maximum (c.20,000 years ago). We're not sure when it went extinct in Britain, as bears and bear skins continued to be imported from Scandinavian and Germany in the Roman and medieval periods, but it seems to have become very uncommon from the Neolithic onwards.

Woolly Mammoth

Yes No

Pleistocene megafauna with a habitat that stretched across northern Eurasia and North America. Lived during the Pleistocene until its extinction in the Holocene, 400,000 to 14,000 years ago. Remains have been recovered in Norfolk and at Creswell Crags, Nottinghamshire.

Platypus

Yes No

Sub-aquatic monotreme endemic to Eastern Australia

Wolf

Yes No

Generally thought to have become extinct by the end of the 16th century. Fossil finds recorded in North Yorkshire, as well as Devon.

Beaver

Yes No

Became extinct in Great Britain in the later medieval/post-medieval period, with the last reference to them dating to 1789. They have been reintroduced to Scotland, Kent, Gloucestershire, and Lancashire. In January 2024, City of York Council stated it was open to discussing the reintroduction of beavers to the River Ouse as part of plans to combat flooding.





Rat

Yes

No

The black rat was introduced by the Romans in the 1st century CE, and again in the 9th century CE following a post-Roman decline and possible extinction. The brown rat, now most common across the country, was introduced in the early 1700s.

Red deer

Yes

No

One of the largest species of deer. It has inhabited most of Europe from the Miocene (23 million years ago) to the present day.

Fox

Yes

No

The earliest fossil remains of the modern species of fox date to the mid-Pleistocene (1.25 million years ago) in association with the refuse from human settlements, leading to the theory that early humans hunted the red fox for its meat and pelts.

Vole

Yes

No

Many different species of voles are endemic to the British Isles, including the water vole, bank vole, and field vole. We can use changes in the teeth of voles to date Pleistocene/ Palaeolithic sites like Boxgrove (Lower Palaeolithic site in West Sussex, c. 500,000 years old. Homo heidelbergensis remains found) using the 'Vole Clock'.

Raccoon

Yes

No

Native to North America.

Cave hyena

Yes

No

An extinct relative of the modern hyena, cave hyenas lived in Britain in the Middle to Late Pleistocene, 500,000 to 48,000 years ago. Remains recorded from Kents Caverns, Torquay; Wookey Hole, Somerset; Creswell Crags, Nottinghamshire; and Kirkdale Caves, Yorkshire.





Woolly rhino

Yes

No

Common throughout Europe and northern Asia during the Pleistocene and survived until the end of the last glacial period (3.6 million years ago to 14,000 years ago). Remains recovered in South Wales, and at Creswell Crags, Nottinghamshire.

Hedgehog

Yes

No

Five of the 17 species of hedgehog are found in parts of Europe, and haven't changed much in 15 million years. The name hedgehog was first used around 1450. Other names included urchin, hedgepig, and furze-pig.

Giraffe

Yes

No

Tallest living terrestrial animal. Native to Africa.

Chicken

Yes

No

Domesticated from the red Junglefowl from Asia and India. They were introduced to Britain during the Iron Age.

Wild boar

Yes

No

Early Pleistocene to Holocene. They were becoming rare in Britain by the 11th century, and William the Conqueror enacted a forestry law in 1087 that punished people by blinding for killing a boar. They were finally driven to extinction by the 14th century. Following reintroduction (some accidental escapes from wildlife parks) they have re-established themselves in Kent, East Sussex, and Devon.

Guinea pig

Yes

No

Native to South America. Guinea pigs were imported to Europe as pets from the 16th century onwards, and there is a painting in the National Portrait Gallery by an unknown artist dating to 1580 showing three children and their pet guinea pig.

Sheep

Yes

No

The wild ancestors of modern-day domestic sheep were native to the Middle East and were first domesticated there around 10,000 years ago. They were first brought to Britain in the Neolithic, around 6000 years ago.

