

Animals That Went to Space

Before humans began to travel beyond the Earth's atmosphere, various animals were rocketed into space to study the effects of space travel on living things.



Why Have Animals Been Sent to Space?

When the development of rocket technology led to serious talks of space exploration, there were many opinions about what the effects of space travel might be on the human body. Scientists were concerned about the effects of long-term weightlessness, the speed of space travel itself, the possible radiation of the Sun beyond the protective shield of the Earth's atmosphere and the impact of the return journey through the atmosphere. Their concerns had to be investigated before they felt human beings could be sent safely into space.

At White Sands Missile Range, New Mexico, United States of America, the first deliberate launch of a living thing into space took place on 20th February 1947; a group of fruit flies was sent into space onboard a modified V-2 rocket. Scientists had sent these small insects to see if the Sun's radiation would affect them. With no negative effects apparent, their flight motivated scientists to continue further space exploration. Over time, more animals were launched into space to answer additional questions.





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The Soviet Union

As part of their own investigations, the USSR (a country called the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics that existed from 1922–1991 and was also known as the Soviet Union) sent quite a few homeless, stray dogs up into space and beyond the Earth's atmosphere.

The most famous of these strays was Laika: the first dog to not only go to space but to orbit the Earth as well. She'd been found on the streets of Moscow and was a young, female, mixed-breed dog. On 3rd November 1957, Laika was launched inside a spacecraft named Sputnik II. She orbited the Earth several times. Due to Laika's orbits, scientists felt that humans might also be able to travel safely in space. Almost four years later, Yuri Gagarin became the first Soviet cosmonaut and the first human to successfully travel into space and orbit the Earth.



The United States

As part of the United States' space programme, a rhesus monkey, called Albert II, became the first monkey sent into space in a V-2 Blossom rocket on 14th June 1949. More monkeys followed, such as Sam, Miss Sam and Yorick. On 31st January 1961, a chimpanzee named Ham was sent into space from Cape Canaveral, Florida, USA. During his flight, Ham had been trained to pull and push levers in response to flashing lights.



This indicated that astronauts could possibly concentrate and perform tasks while travelling in space.

While flying, he experienced over 6 minutes of weightlessness before splashing down safely in the Atlantic Ocean 16.5 minutes after takeoff. Ham's mission made it possible for the successful launch of the United States' first human astronaut, Alan B Shepard Jr, in 1961. He followed a similar flight path to Ham's and in the same type of rocket, a Mercury Redstone rocket.

Other Animals

Many other animals have been sent into space to conduct various experiments. France sent the first cat, named Félicette, in 1963. In 1968, two tortoises sent by the Soviet Union became the first living things to orbit the Moon. Months later, Apollo 11 landed on the Moon. In addition, guinea pigs, spiders, worms, cockroaches, mice, jellyfish, rabbits and other animals have all been sent into space to help us investigate and answer questions.

Animals have been an important part of space exploration since it began. They have contributed to our knowledge about space travel and its effects on living things.



Questions

1. Where was Laika found? Tick one.

- ☐ New Mexico
- ☐ Moscow
- ☐ Cape Canaveral
- ☐ London

2. Draw **four** lines and match each spacecraft or rocket to its description.

V-2 rocket	landed on the Moon
Apollo 11	launched the first chimpanzee into space
Mercury Redstone	launched the first living things into space
Sputnik II	launched Laika into space

3. Who was the United States' first human astronaut to go up into space?

4. Look at the section called **Why Have Animals Been Sent to Space?**

Find and copy one word that means the same as 'on purpose' or 'intentional'.

5. Fill in the missing words.

When the _____ of rocket technology led to serious talks of space exploration, there were many _____ about what the effects of space travel might be on the human body.

6. Why do you think scientists use rocket technology to send people into space? Explain your answer.

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7. Would you like to be an astronaut? Explain your answer.

8. What was your favourite fact about animals in space? Explain your answer.

9. How do you think the scientists on the ground felt when they sent Alan B Shephard Jr up into space? Explain your answer.
