



Media training

Alex Morrison, press officer



Good news:

You already know how to write a brilliant press release

Bad news:

You may (sometimes) fail to use this skill



Example

Which of the following would you say?

You'll never guess what... blueberries give you superpowers

Or

You'll never guess what... according to recent research by scientists at the University of Exeter, funded by BBSRC, consuming blueberries can give human males and females abilities which defy scientific explanation.



What do these words have in common?

Dynamic

Steering group

Community engagement forum

Impacts

Stakeholders

Outcomes

Challenges

Novel approach

Multidisciplinary



What makes a good story?

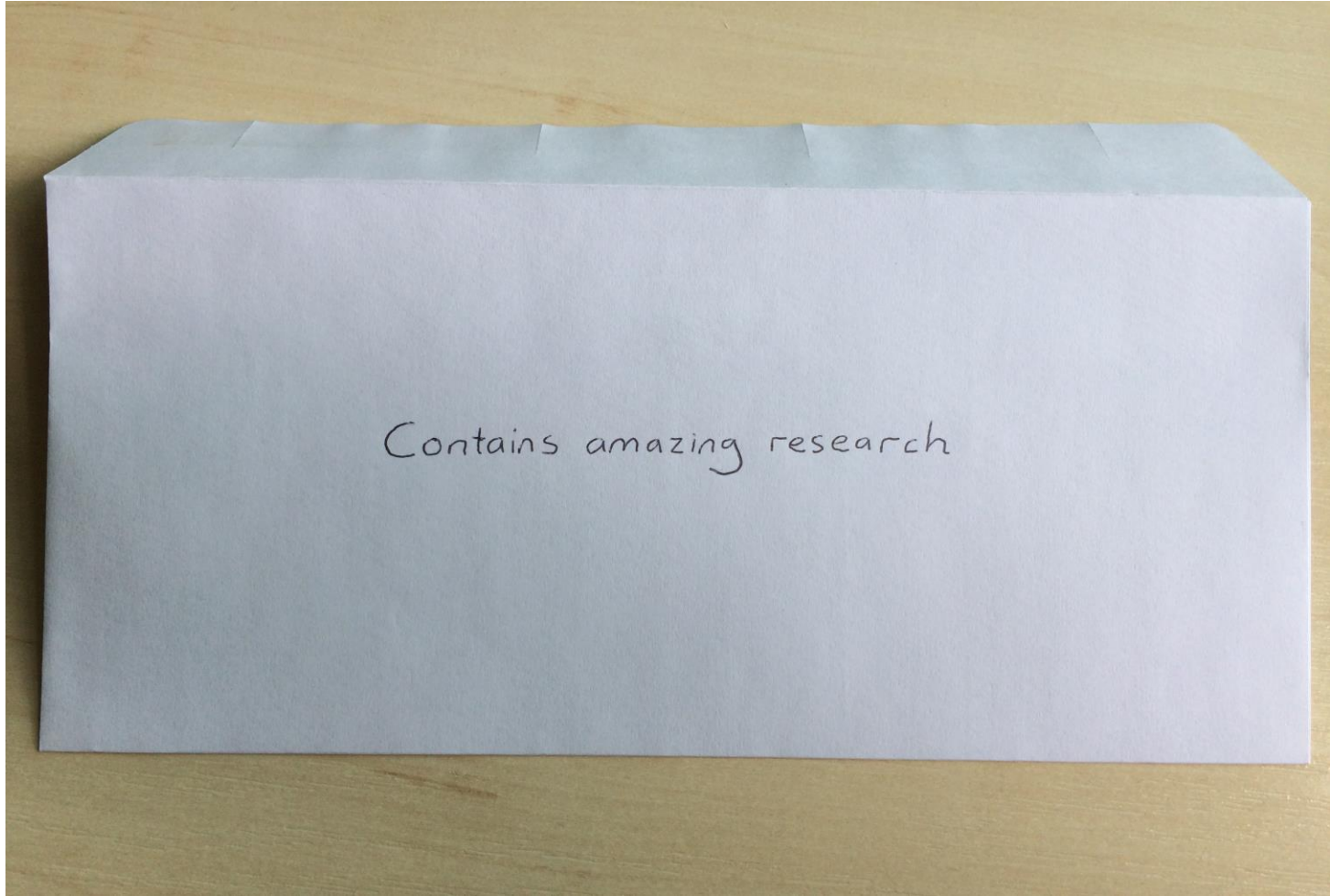
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Microplastics: Premium teabags leak billions of particles - study	5
Saudi Arabia to open up to foreign tourists with new visas	6
'Clueless' Cleveland Police 'putting public at risk'	7
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- Things that affect me
- Things that make me feel something
(fear, amusement, sympathy, anger)
- I didn't know that!
- Good storytelling



An important point...



Another important point...



What does the press office do?



Example: What we received

Abstract

We sampled 17 nesting sites for loggerhead (*Caretta caretta*) and green turtles (*Chelonia mydas*) in Cyprus. Microplastics (<5 mm) were found at all locations and depths, with particularly high abundance in superficial sand. The top 2 cm of sand presented grand mean \pm SD particle counts of $45,497 \pm 11,456$ particles m^{-3} (range 637–131,939 particles m^{-3}). The most polluted beaches were among the worst thus far recorded, presenting levels approaching those previously recorded in Guangdong, South China. Microplastics decreased with increasing sand depth but were present down to turtle nest depths of 60 cm (mean $5,325 \pm 3,663$ particles m^{-3}). Composition varied among beaches but hard fragments ($46.5 \pm 3.5\%$) and pre-production nurdles ($47.8 \pm 4.5\%$) comprised most categorised pieces. Particle drifter analysis hindcast for 365 days indicated that most plastic likely originated from the eastern Mediterranean basin. Worsening microplastic abundance could result in anthropogenically altered life history parameters such as hatching success and sex ratios in marine turtles.



Example: What we wrote

Microplastics found deep in sand where turtles nest

Microplastics have been found deep in the sand on beaches where sea turtles lay their eggs.

University of Exeter scientists found an average of 5,300 particles of plastic per cubic metre at depths of 60cm (2ft) on beaches in Cyprus used by green turtles and loggerheads.

At the surface, up to 130,000 fragments of plastic were found per cubic metre – the second-worst level ever recorded on a beach (the worst was in Guangdong, South China).

Researchers say that if conditions worsen such pollution could eventually begin to affect hatching success and even the ratio of male and female turtle hatchlings.



Example: Coverage

Microplastics could affect sea turtle hatching and alter number of females born, says study



Plastic debris was found on the surface and deep down in the beach's sand in Cyprus (Photo: Jessica Arrowsmith)

Plastic waste threatens nesting turtles



A newborn loggerhead turtle makes its way to the ocean. Plastic could upset the gender balance
PAUL WITAKER/REUTERS

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Plastic waste on beaches where turtles nest could result in more females being born and eventually reduce the overall population, a study suggests.

An average of 5,300 particles of plastic per cubic metre at depths of 60cm (2ft) were found on beaches in Cyprus used by green and loggerhead turtles. At the surface, up to 130,000 fragments of plastic were found per cubic metre.

The i newsletter

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Scientists have warned that microplastics found deep in the sand on beaches where sea turtles lay their eggs could disrupt hatching success and alter the ratio of females and males born.

University of Exeter scientists found an average of 5,300 particles of plastic per cubic metre at depths of 60cm (2ft) on beaches in Cyprus used by green turtles and loggerheads.

Mediterranean microplastics: Researchers uncover "extreme pollution" on beaches

Email  Print      

26 Sep 2018 ---- Record high levels of microplastics for the Mediterranean region have been found deep in the sand where sea turtles lay their eggs by University of Exeter researchers. The study identified an average of 5,300 particles of plastic per cubic meter at depths of 60cm on beaches in Cyprus used by green turtles and loggerheads. Researchers say that if conditions worsen such pollution could eventually begin to affect hatching success and even the ratio of male and female turtle hatchlings.



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The microplastic threat to turtles

Scientists are warning that microplastics found deep in the sand on beaches where sea turtles lay their eggs could disrupt hatching success and alter the ratio of females and males born. Up to 130,000 fragments of plastic were found per cubic metre on the beach surface in Cyprus in the Mediterranean Sea. Professor Brendan Godley of Exeter University was one of the researchers.

(Photo: green turtle hatchling. Credit: Sam Weber)

27 September 2018
2 minutes

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What's the story in the following paper?



From paper:

Abstract

The great increase in the study of dog cognition in the current century has yielded insights into canine cognition in a variety of domains. In this review we seek to place our enhanced understanding of canine cognition into context. We argue that in order to assess dogs' cognition, we need to regard dogs from three different perspectives: phylogenetically, as a carnivore and specifically a canid; ecologically, as social, cursorial hunters; and anthropogenically, as a domestic animal. A principled understanding of canine cognition should therefore involve comparing dogs' cognition with that of other carnivores, other social hunters, and other domestic animals. This paper contrasts dog cognition with what is known about cognition in species that fit into these three categories, with a particular emphasis on wolves, cats, spotted hyenas, chimpanzees, dolphins, horses and pigeons. We cover sensory cognition, physical cognition, spatial cognition, social cognition, and self-awareness. Although the comparisons are incomplete, because of the limited range of studies of some of the other relevant species, we conclude that dogs' cognition is influenced by their membership of all three of these groups, and taking all three groups into account, dog cognition does not look **exceptional.**



To press release:

Press release: For immediate release

Dog intelligence 'not exceptional'

People who think dogs are exceptionally intelligent are barking up the wrong tree, [new research shows](#).

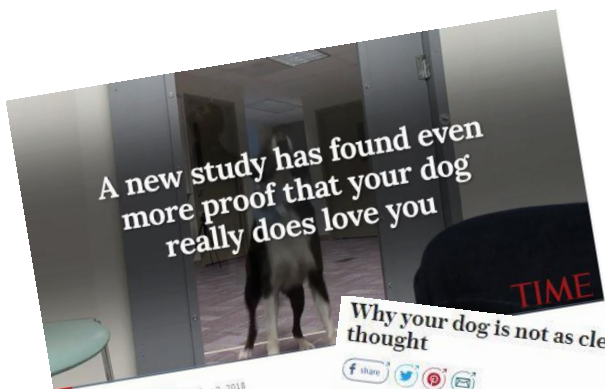
Scientists reviewed evidence that compared the brain power of dogs with other domestic animals, other social hunters and other carnivorans (an order including animals such as dogs, wolves, bears, lions and hyenas).

The researchers, from the University of Exeter and Canterbury Christ Church University, found the cognitive abilities of dogs were at least matched by several species in each of these groups.

The study examined more than 300 papers on the intelligence of dogs and other animals, and found several cases of “over interpretation” in favour of dogs’ abilities.



To headlines:



A new study has found even more proof that your dog really does love you

TIME

Why your dog is not as clever as you thought



By JAMIE DUCHARME October 2, 2018

For more, visit TIME Health.

Your dog may be a good boy—but he's not as smart as you think, a new article suggests.

Dogs have a unique set of cognitive abilities, says the new paper in *Learning & Behavior*. "Dogs are smart in ways that other animals aren't," says author Britta Osthaus, a senior lecturer at the University in the UK. "They're smart in ways that other animals aren't."



Picture for thought: the University of Exeter reviewed more than 300 papers on animal brain power

Why a green energy revolution is set to sweep the nation
Cadent CEO outlines his vision of the green energy revolution
Read more
Sponsored

Follow **By Henry Eodkin**
1 OCTOBER 2018 - 6:48PM

Dogs are less intelligent than most people think, a new study has found, revealing that canines are no smarter than pigeons, sheep or goats.
Researchers from the University of Exeter reviewed more than 300 papers on animal brain power, comparing dogs with other domestic animals, social hunters and carnivores such as wolves, bears, lions and hyenas.

Dogs are no more intelligent than other animals

SCIENCE
By Claire Hayhurst

Dogs are not exceptionally intelligent when compared with other animals, including dolphins and goats, scientists have said.
Researchers from the University of Exeter and Canterbury Christ Church University reviewed more than 300 papers on animal brain power. The studies compared the cognitive abilities of dogs with other domestic animals, social hunters and carnivores such as wolves, bears and lions.
They showed that the skills of dogs - such as following human pointing and recognising faces - were matched and often surpassed by several species.
For example, dogs are unable to recognise themselves in a mirror, unlike animals including chimpanzees and dolphins.
Professor Stephen Lea, of Exeter University, said his team identified several cases of "over-interpretation" in favouring dogs' abilities in many of the studies, suggesting that researchers set out to "prove" how clever dogs are.

Dog News: Man's best friend not as smart as we think, 'don't expect too much' study says

DOGS might be man's best friend but it is not because of their brainpower.

By STUART WINTER
PUBLISHED: 00:00, Mon, Oct 1, 2018 | UPDATED: 16:17, Mon, Oct 1, 2018



DOGS ARE NOT "EXCEPTIONALLY INTELLIGENT" COMPARED TO OTHER ANIMALS, STUDY REVEALS

BY ARISTOS GEORGIU ON 10/1/18 AT 10:11 AM



SHARE

TECH & SCIENCE

Dogs are often portrayed as being exceptionally clever and able compared to other animals. But is this really the case?
In an attempt to answer the question, U.K. researchers from the University of Exeter and Canterbury Christ Church University reviewed more than 300 scientific studies on the cognitive abilities of dogs and other animals for a paper published in the journal *Learning & Behavior*. They found that in several cases, dogs' intelligence had been overstated.

Who's a clever boy then? Not Rover

They may be experts at winning our hearts, but dogs are not quite as bright as their owners think. Many overestimate the brain power of pets (Ben Webster writes).
Dogs are not exceptionally intelligent when compared with other animals, a study found. Pigs, wolves and even pigeons perform better at some tasks, and sheep have a similar

ability to recognise faces. Scientists examined more than 300 studies on the intelligence of dogs and found several cases of "over-interpretation" in favour of their abilities. Professor Stephen Lea, of Exeter University, said his team identified several cases of "over-interpretation" in favouring dogs' abilities in many of the studies, suggesting that researchers set out to "prove" how clever dogs are.



How to write a press release

- Start with main findings, then elaborate
- Stress relevance to public
- Use simple language
- Don't waste words
- Focus on story (put "PR" stuff low down)
- **Be accurate**



Thinking inside the box

CEEFAX 1 503 Tue 10 May 19:11/04

ENTERTAINMENT

ITV to drop Celebrity Wrestling
High-profile ITV show Celebrity Wrestling has been dropped from schedules after poor ratings.

The show, which saw 12 personalities train and fight each other, was part of ITV's primetime schedule but failed to compete with the relaunched Doctor Who.

The show will go out at 1830 BST this Saturday but it is not known what will happen to the final four episodes.

ITV said the show had enjoyed a "strong start", but ratings fell to 2.6 million viewers on Saturday.

Music 530	TV Index 520	Films 540
Games 550	Children 570	DVDs 547

Next News TV Index Children EntIndex



Twitter can help you focus on key points

Compose new Tweet



What's happening?



140

Tweet



Writing task – herring gulls

Abstract

Human-wildlife conflict is one of the greatest threats to species populations worldwide. One species facing national declines in the UK is the herring gull (*Larus argentatus*), despite an increase in numbers in urban areas. Gulls in urban areas are often considered a nuisance due to behaviours such as food-snatching. Whether urban gull feeding behaviour is influenced by human behavioural cues, such as gaze direction, remains unknown. We therefore measured the approach times of herring gulls to a food source placed in close proximity to an experimenter who either looked directly at the gull or looked away. We found that only 26% of targeted gulls would touch the food, suggesting that food-snatching is likely to be conducted by a minority of individuals. When gulls did touch the food, they took significantly longer to approach when the experimenter's gaze was directed towards them compared to directed away. However, inter-individual behaviour varied greatly, with some gulls approaching similarly quickly in both treatments while others approached much more slowly when the experimenter was looking at them. These results indicate that reducing human-herring gull conflict may be possible through small changes in human behaviour, but will require consideration of behavioural differences between individual gulls.



The press release

Press release: Embargoed until 00.01 BST on Wednesday 7 August 2019

Staring at seagulls could save your chips

Staring at seagulls makes them less likely to steal your food, [new research shows](#).

University of Exeter researchers put a bag of chips on the ground and tested how long it took herring gulls to approach when a human was watching them, compared to when the human looked away.

On average, gulls took 21 seconds longer to approach the food with a human staring at them.

The researchers attempted to test 74 gulls, but most flew away or would not approach – only 27 approached the food, and 19 completed both the “looking at” and “looking away” tests. The findings focus on these 19 gulls.



Gulls coverage



BBC Breakfast @BBCBreakfast · Aug 7
Ever had your chips snatched by a gull? 🐦
@Gull_Mad has this advice for you...
#standyourground

BBC BREAKFAST

Madeleine Goumas
University of Exeter

So I thought perhaps that gulls might actually not like being looked at by people.

11.8K views 08 / 041



More than 1,000 articles worldwide
Hundreds of TV and radio reports

Staring down seagulls can stop them stealing your chips



LIFE 7 August 2019

By Sam Wong



Keep the birds at bay with a simple staring contest.

Paul Goodburn / Alamy Stock Photo

The threat of having your ice cream or chips pilfered by a seagull will be familiar to anyone who goes on seaside holidays in the UK, but a study suggests there is a way to keep avian scavengers at bay: keep your eyes on them.

Staring at seagulls helps protect food, say scientists

8 August 2019

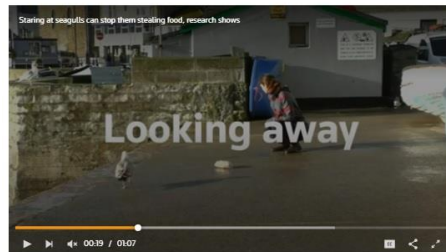


GETTY IMAGES

The secret to protecting your seaside chips from scavenging seagulls is to stare at them, scientists have said.

Staring at seagulls can stop them stealing food, research shows

2 MIN READ



LONDON (Reuters) - Britain's seaside towns are at war with their seagulls, urging visitors not to feed the birds in an effort to stop them snatching ribbits like potato chips from tourists' hands.

Warning signs deck promenade railings from Scarborough to Broadstairs and beyond but now research from the University of Exeter has suggested an easy way for holidaymakers to deter the gulls - just stare at them.

Stare seagulls out to save your snacks, researcher says

Giving marauding birds the eye makes them more wary of stealing food, study finds



▲ A seagull swipes a chip in Brighton. Photograph: Hristo Sokolov/Getty Images/EyeEm

They attack in a blur of white and grey. In an instant, a pleasant day at the beach is transformed into a Hitchcockian nightmare of screams, pecks and flapping wings. Before the victim knows what hit them, their sausage roll is no more.

THE TIMES

Fashion's gold rush
Bling is in for summer

My sex drought
Dries the tears for Tinder

Met paid another police force £1m to investigate abuse fantasist

Labour and SNP hint at pact to oust Johnson

Deal could back Turfquest of govern. says Sturgeon

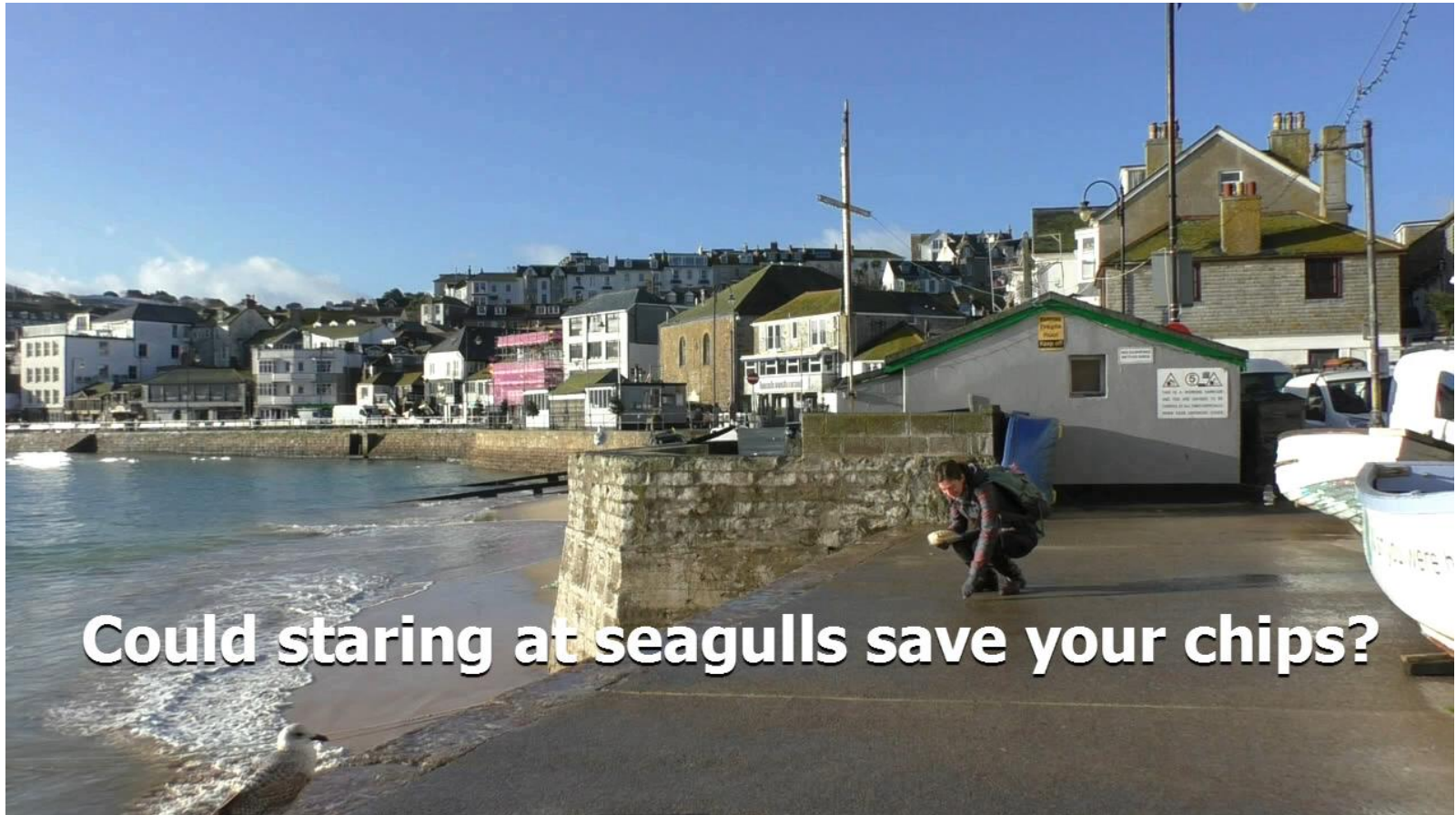
Give seagulls a hard stare to save your chips



Images and videos



Video for press and social media



Video for press and social media



University of Exeter
@UniofExeter

Could staring at #seagulls save your chips? Read more about the new @UniExeCornwall research at: ex.ac.uk/seagulls



9:49 AM · Aug 7, 2019 · Twitter Media Studio

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UK news World news Royals Health Defence Science Education Investigations

News Science

Staring at seagulls is best way to stop them stealing your chips



Save 20



www.exeter.ac.uk



Why talk to the media?



Why talk to the media?

- Change public perceptions or behaviour
- Impact on government policy
- Inspire the next generation of researchers
- Secure future funding
- Raise the profile of your organisation
- Call for study participants



Preconceptions

- Journalists will twist my words
- The science will be 'dumbed down'

Solutions?



What do journalists want?

- The truth?
- A good story
- Controversy
- Light / shade
- You - human/expert voice



Interviews: Preparation is key!

- Find out about show / journalist / focus / timescale / format
- Off-air briefing?
- Honorifics
- Have a “top line” in mind
- **Answer the question**
- Beware the final question



If in doubt...



exeter press office



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And finally...



Any questions?

