

The World of Upside Down

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photos by Alamy

Maybe you've done a cartwheel or rolled through a tumble turn in the pool. Maybe you've swung so high your toes tickled the sky while your head dipped towards the ground. Or maybe you've zoomed on a roller coaster ... up, up, up, then whooshed down the other side, squealing through a loop-the-loop. Here come some brain-boggling, upside-down facts!

Up, up and away

Have you ever seen trapeze artists soaring through the air, hanging upside down mid-flight? In 1859, French acrobat Jules Léotard made the first flying leap between two swinging bars and invented the *flying trapeze* that we see today. The leotard (the one-piece costume he wore) is named after him.

Trapeze artists need extraordinary strength, flexibility, balance and mental focus to perform this daring circus skill. High above the ground, they hook their knees, or even their ankles, over the bar, swinging with perfect timing to catch their partner by the wrists, midair. It's a gasp-inducing upside-down moment.

Head over heels

What animal zips through the sky dangling upside down from a helicopter? If you guessed crocodile, armadillo or hog-nosed bat ... sorry, you're wrong! It's actually one of the heaviest land animals on Earth—the rhinoceros.

This wild helicopter ride isn't for fun. It's a life-saving mission to protect critically endangered rhinos from poachers, who kill them for their valuable horns. Rhinos have roamed the planet for 50 million years. Fossil evidence shows that there were once more than 150 species, but only five species remain today.

Here's how the rescue works: the rhino is first tranquillised, so it falls asleep. Then soft straps are tied

around its ankles. Finally, the straps are connected to a single rope hooked to the underside of the helicopter. And up the rhino goes, flying upside down!

It might look strange, but the upside-down position helps the rhino breathe easily. Its weight naturally makes its head and neck extend downward, straightening its spine. Its horn acts like a bird's tail feather or boat rudder, keeping it steady in the air. The rhino is flown to a secret, safe wilderness area to live a happy rhino life.

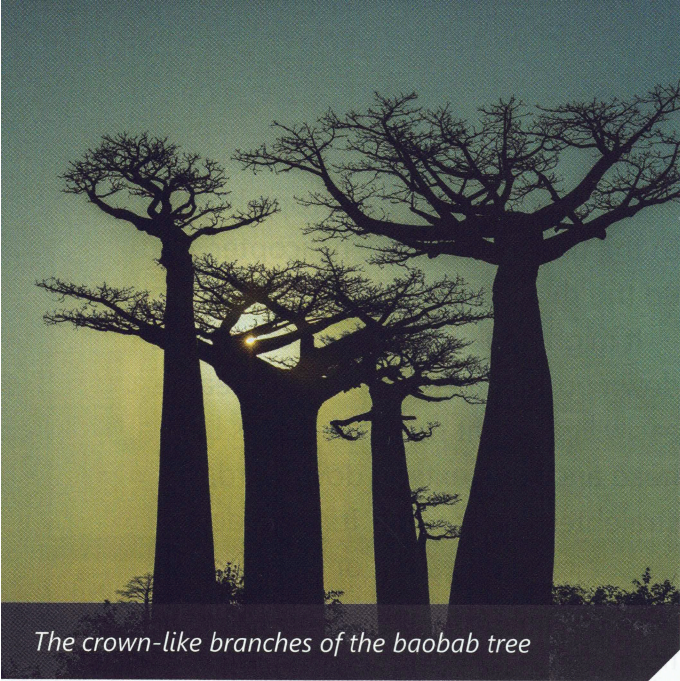
Topsy-turvy jellyfish

When you think of jellyfish, you might think of them as blubbing along in the water, minding their own business, trailing their tentacles behind them. But there's one species of jellyfish, about the size of a dinner plate, known as the Upside-Down Jellyfish.

In the warm waters of lagoons and shallow coastal areas, these jellyfish, called *Cassiopea*, start life like normal jellyfish. When they grow to two centimetres, they move to the sea floor and flip upside down with their tentacles wagging towards the sun. Algae that feed on sunlight grow within the tentacles. It's win-win, as the jellyfish feed on the algae's nutrients. They're solar-powered upside-downers!



A rhino being transported by helicopter



The crown-like branches of the baobab tree

The upside-down tree

There's a very unusual tree called the baobab. It can grow over 25 metres tall, and its branches grow only from the top, like a crown. Its thick, sponge-like trunk can store up to 120 000 litres of water, perfect for surviving in hot places like Africa, Madagascar, India and Australia, where it's often called the boab or bottle tree. One famous South African baobab is believed to be over 6000 years old. That's older than the Egyptian pyramids!

But the strangest thing? For most of the year, the tree has no leaves and looks like it's been planted upside down, with its roots sticking into the air.

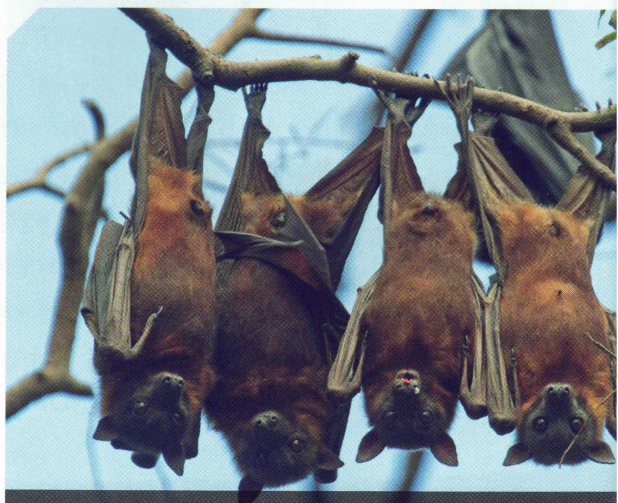
An African legend explains how the baobab came to be. When the gods made the first tree, it was the

baobab. It was able to talk. But it complained all the time. It didn't like the sun, the wind or the birds nesting in its branches. Tired of its whining, the gods pulled it up and replanted it upside down to teach it a lesson. It never complained again!

Hanging around

There's something spooky about watching the black silhouettes of bats flapping across the night sky or hearing the flicker-flap of leathery wings near a fruit tree. Maybe you've heard stories about Count Dracula turning into a bat to fly through the night and frighten people.

Bats may look creepy, but they are really superheroes of the night. While out flying and feasting on fruit and bugs, they can eat up to 1200 mosquitoes in an hour. When they poop, they reseed the forest and even pollinate plants, which gives us more food to eat.



Bats hanging upside down from a branch

Bats are nocturnal: they feed at night and sleep during the day. To avoid predators, they hang by their claws upside down from tree branches or cave ceilings. They hang like tiny umbrellas with their wings wrapped around their bodies like blankets. When it's time to fly, they just drop, open their wings and off they go. Bat-tastic!

Bottom side up

Can you imagine looking at the world upside down for 1400 kilometres while walking on your hands? That's what an Austrian man, Johann Hurlinger, did. He walked upside down from Vienna to Paris, in 1900. That's like walking from Sydney to Adelaide! He walked for 55 days, 10 hours at a time and gained the Guinness World Record for the longest distance walking on hands. Ouch!

Another Guinness World Record goes to the American Zion Clark, who was born without legs. He set



the record in 2021 for the fastest 20 metres walking on hands. He did it in 4.78 seconds.

The longest single-arm handstand by a female was also set in 2021 by Austrian Stefanie Millinger. She balanced for 1 minute and 48.61 seconds. Now that's a handy record! ■



What happens when you turn a shark upside down?

It goes into a trance-like state called 'tonic immobility'. The shark becomes still, like it's been hypnotised. This state can last up to 15 minutes. Scientists sometimes do this to study sharks safely.