



## LESSON PLAN

<b>Level:</b>	Grades 9 to 10
<b>About the Author:</b>	Matthew Johnson, Director of Education, MediaSmarts
<b>Duration:</b>	1-2 hours

# Authentication Beyond the Classroom



This lesson is part of USE, UNDERSTAND & CREATE: A Digital Literacy Framework for Canadian Schools: <http://mediasmarts.ca/teacher-resources/digital-literacy-framework>.

## Overview

In this lesson, students discuss “viral” photos, videos and news stories that spread via social media. They are shown how challenging it is to authenticate these using only their content and are introduced to tools and techniques for gauging their accuracy based on context, with an eye towards making wise and responsible decisions about whether or not to forward them to their friends and family.

## Learning Outcomes

Students will:

- Develop habits of skepticism
- Learn strategies and techniques for authenticating online content
- Apply authentication strategies outside of school contexts
- Perform research online
- Present research findings, including a judgment based on research

## Preparation and Materials

- Prepare the project slideshow, *Viral Videos: Real or Fake?*
- Photocopy the handouts: *Four Steps to Fact-Checking* and *Viral News Fact-Check*
- Find four to six recent viral news stories. You can use sites such as:
  - *The Mirror’s “Viral”* page (<http://www.mirror.co.uk/all-about/viral>)
  - *Uproxx’s Viral Stories* (<https://uproxx.com/topic/viral-stories/>)
  - *Not Real News: What Didn’t Happen This Week* (<https://www.apnews.com/NotRealNews>) or
  - *Honey viral stories* (<https://honey.nine.com.au/viral-stories>).

(Not all of the stories have to be fake. Because of the unpredictable content on some of these pages, it’s best to curate the stories ahead of time rather than letting students browse for them.)



## Procedure

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### Viral Photos

Begin by asking students how many of them have seen “viral” photos or videos that were passed around on social media. (Most or all hands will go up.) How many have seen a viral photo in the last week? How many have *passed on* viral photos to other people (by sharing them, retweeting them, tagging them, etc.)?

Now ask: How many have ever seen a viral photo that turned out to be a fake? If they have, did they guess that it was a fake? If they did not guess, how did they find out?

Show the first eight slides of the slideshow *Viral Photos: Real or Fake?* Ask students to guess which ones were real and which ones were fake, and to explain how they came to that conclusion.

Next, show slides 9 to 14. Which ones did students get right? Which did they get wrong? How reliable was their reasoning?

### Why Does it Matter?

Go to slide 15 and ask: Why does it matter if we’re wrong about something like viral videos? Let students discuss the question for a few minutes but don’t make them come to any conclusion.

Show slides 16-17 and ask students to spot the difference. (An extra missile was added.) Explain that this is a photo of an Iranian missile test, which was released by the Iranian government to make it look like more of the missiles being tested were launched successfully.

Now show slides 18-19 and ask students to spot the difference. (The women have been removed from the image.) Explain that this was a news photo from a rally in Paris, in which several women – including German chancellor Angela Merkel – were Photoshopped out when it appeared in the conservative Orthodox Israeli newspaper *The Announcer*.

Now show slides 20-21 and ask students to spot the difference. (The text of the sign in the middle has been changed.) Explain that this was a news photo from the protests in Ferguson, Missouri, over the shooting of an unarmed African-American man. This doctored photo was used by racists to try to make the protests seem illegitimate, but wound up being spread by many people.

Point out to students that it’s not just photos and videos that are viral: viral rumours, health tips, and news stories – which may be mistakes, hoaxes or malicious disinformation – spread just as easily. Remind students of the digital and media literacy key concepts *Media have social and political implications* and *Digital media are networked*. For more information on these concepts, see <http://mediasmarts.ca/digital-media-literacy/general-information/digital-media-literacy-fundamentals/media-literacy-fundamentals>. If you think your students need a more thorough explanation of these concepts, show them these videos:

- Media have social and political implications (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YZi6s22yktw>)
- Digital media are networked (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b-HXiObDDnA>)



## Authenticating Viral Stories

Tell students that if they doubted *all* the photos, their instincts were good: you shouldn't believe *anything* you see or read through social media until you verify it. Point out how similar the bicycle-in-a-tree and piano-around-a-tree photos in the slideshow were. Was there any way to tell, just from looking at the photos, which was real and which was fake? (Not really.)

Unfortunately, Canadian students are **least** likely to do anything to authenticate information that comes to them from social networks. As well, the **triangle** method – looking for other sources that say the same thing – can lead us astray when it comes to viral content because we often **are** seeing the same story come from several different sources.

Now distribute the handout *Four Steps to Fact-Checking* and go through it with the class. Now show slides 22-23 to the class and ask: How would you decide whether or not to spread this story?

Discuss with the class for a few minutes, highlighting techniques from *Four Steps to Fact-Checking* that seem relevant. Show slides 24-32 and talk through them with the class. What's their verdict? (The story appears to be genuine.)

## Assessment/Evaluation

Distribute the handout *Viral News Fact-Check* and have students perform the assignment, authenticating a recent viral photo or news story by finding at least three pieces of evidence from different sources that suggest it is either true or false. If you wish to use the assignment for evaluation you can grade it with the *Viral News Fact-Check Rubric*.



## Four Steps to Fact-Checking

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What makes a photo or a news story go viral? Research suggests that it's when something engages our emotions, surprises us, gives us a striking image or a personal connection to the story, and provokes our curiosity. Unfortunately, those same things also make us less likely to look critically at something – which means it's easy to be tricked by fake viral content.

*So how can you know if something that's spreading is true?*

Research shows that students are **least** likely to fact-check news and other things that come to them through social networks like Facebook or Twitter, but these are their **most** common sources of news.

You don't have to debunk **everything** that comes to you, though. Ask yourself these questions:

- Am I about to share, tag, retweet or forward this?
- Could someone base an important decision (about their health, their career, travel, etc.) on this?
- Is it about a hot or controversial issue?
- Does this seem “too good to be true”?

If the answer to **any** of those is “Yes”, double-check it!

Here are four quick steps you can use to fact-check something. They will usually take you less than a minute to do, and most of the time you'll get your answer by using just one or two of them.

### 1. Use Fact-Checking Tools

One of the quickest ways of checking a claim is to see if a fact-checker has debunked it. You can visit a fact-checker such as Snopes.com or use our custom search of ten fact-checkers, [www.bit.ly/fact-search](http://www.bit.ly/fact-search).

- If you want to use a different fact-checker, make sure it's signed on to the International Fact-Checking Network's code of principles (see <https://ifcncodeofprinciples.poynter.org/signatories>).
- To look at a broader range of sources, do a search for the story with the word “hoax” or “fake” added.
- Remember that just because a fact-checker hasn't debunked something doesn't mean it's true. It can take a while for fact-checkers to verify a story, and not every one will verify every story.
- If no reliable fact-checker has covered it yet, move on to other steps like Find the Source or Check Other Sources.

### 2. Find the Source

Because it's so easy to copy and share things online, it's important to find out where something originally came from before you decide whether or not to trust it. Someone might have shared it with you on social media, or a news story might be based on someone else's story.

- The easiest way to find the source is usually to follow links that will lead you to the original story. In social media like Facebook or Twitter, the link is usually at the end or bottom of the post.



- On a website, follow links that lead back to the source. Look for phrases like “According to” a source, a source “reported” or the word “Source” at the top or bottom of a story. Make sure to keep going until you’re sure you’re at the original!
- You can also use a search engine like Google or DuckDuckGo. See if you can find any information about where the story originally came from and do a search.
- To find the original source of a photo or image, you can use something called reverse image search. Start by right-clicking on the image and selecting the option “Copy Image Location.” Then go to the website TinEye.com and paste in the address you just copied and sort the results to show the oldest first.
- If you don’t know if the original source is reliable or not, move on to Verify the Source.
- If you can’t find the original source, move to Check Other Sources.

### 3. Verify the Source

Go to a search engine like Google, or an online encyclopedia like Wikipedia, and search for the site.

If a search for the site’s name gives you too many different results, you can search for its web address instead or add another search term to narrow it down.

This search will also help you find out if the source is reliable. Once you’ve found some information about the source that isn’t from its own website, ask these three questions:

#### 1. Do they really exist?

It’s easy to make fake pictures, fake websites and fake social network profiles that look just as real and professional as anything out there.

“About Us” pages and profiles are easy to fake, so do a search find out if other people say they really exist. Pay attention to things that are hard to fake: for example, it’s easy to make a fake website, but if other websites you know are real and reliable link to it then it’s a sign they think the source is real.

#### 2. Are they who they say they are?

It’s easy to pretend to be someone else online, so once you know the source really exists, you need to find out if what you’re looking at really came from them.

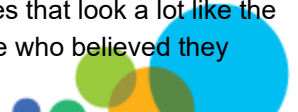
To find out if you’re on an organization’s real website or social network profile, do a search for them and compare the top result to the site you’re on.

#### 3. Are they trustworthy?

For sources of general information, like newspapers, that means asking if they have a process for making sure they’re giving you good information, and a good track record of doing it. How often do they make mistakes? If they do make mistakes, do they admit them and publish corrections? Are they willing to publish things their owners, or their readers, wouldn’t agree with?

Before you believe something (or share it), make sure it isn’t one of these:

- **Jokes:** “Fake news” sites like The Onion and The Beaverton publish spoof news stories that look a lot like the real thing – sometimes *too* real, as many have been shared on social media by people who believed they were true.



- **Hoaxes:** The darker side of jokes are hoaxes that are spread on purpose to mislead people. Sometimes these are motivated by various kinds of prejudice; other times they're just done out of malice.
- **Ads:** Advertisers know that viral content is one of the best ways to get their messages to young people. Some things that are spread around are obviously ads, but others are disguised as "real" content. As with jokes, ads can also be spread by people who don't realize they're ads.

For more specialized sources, you want to do a search to find out whether they're experts or authorities on that topic. Being an expert is more than just being a doctor, a scientist or a professor: make sure they are an expert in the area that they are talking about. (For common names or people who aren't particularly famous, you may need to add the name of the website or the topic they claim to be an expert on.)

#### 4. Check Other Sources

This technique is useful for finding out if a news story really happened and if the sources reporting on it agree on the basic details. You can search the News tab on Google or use our custom news search, [bit.ly/news-search](https://bit.ly/news-search), which searches ten Canadian and international news outlets at once.

You can also use this technique to find out whether something agrees with what most experts on that topic think – what's called the *consensus* view. Sometimes claims that go against the consensus turn out to be true, but they need to give a lot more evidence because that's what consensus is — all the evidence that scientists (or other experts in a particular field) have gathered so far.

Wikipedia is also a good place to look to get the consensus on a topic, because each Wikipedia article represents the consensus of its editors.

You can use our custom science search, [bit.ly/science-search](https://bit.ly/science-search) to find the consensus on specialist topics like science and medicine.



## Viral News Fact-Check

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1. Think of a recent viral news story, photo or video that was shared with you through social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Tumblr, etc.)
  - To count as viral, it must have been shared by at least two people you know.
  - You must not know for sure whether it was true or false.
  - If you can't think of anything, ask me and I will assign you a recent story.
2. Use the techniques we studied in class to determine whether it is **likely** to be true or false. (You may not be able to reach a definite answer.) Make sure to use **at least three** different techniques.
3. Make a **graphic representation** (poster, slideshow, video, etc.) that shows the steps you took in researching this item, your findings, and your **final conclusion** on whether or not you would share it.



## Task Assessment: Viral News Fact-Check Rubric

	<i>Learning Expectations</i>	<i>Achievement</i>
<p><b>Use</b></p> <p>Skills and competencies that fall under “use” range from basic technical know-how – using computer programs such as word processors, web browsers, email, and other communication tools – to the more sophisticated abilities for accessing and using knowledge resources, such as search engines and online databases, and emerging technologies such as cloud computing.</p>	<p>use information technology-related vocabulary in context</p> <p>acquire information from electronic sources</p>	<p>Insufficient (R)</p> <p>Beginning (1)</p> <p>Developing (2)</p> <p>Competent (3)</p> <p>Confident (4)</p>
<p><b>Understand</b></p> <p>Understand includes recognizing how networked technology affects our behaviour and our perceptions, beliefs and feelings about the world around us.</p> <p>Understand also prepares us for a knowledge economy as we develop information management skills for finding, evaluating and effectively using information to communicate, collaborate and solve problems.</p>	<p>demonstrate understanding that anyone can publish on the Web, so not all sites are equally trustworthy</p> <p>judge the validity of content found on the Internet, how to find appropriate material, and what sources can be trusted</p> <p>use overt and implied messages to draw inferences and construct meaning in media texts</p> <p>understand that anyone can publish on the Web, so not all sites are equally trustworthy</p> <p>understand the different purposes and contexts of digital image editing</p> <p>understand both the benefits and drawbacks of using collective intelligence (crowdsourcing), in different contexts</p>	<p>Insufficient (R)</p> <p>Beginning (1)</p> <p>Developing (2)</p> <p>Competent (3)</p> <p>Confident (4)</p>
<p><b>Create</b></p> <p>Create is the ability to produce content and effectively communicate through a variety of digital media tools. It includes being able to adapt what we produce for various contexts and audiences; to create and communicate using rich media such as images, video and sound; and to effectively and responsibly engage with user-generated content such as blogs and discussion forums, video and photo sharing, social gaming and other forms of social media.</p> <p>The ability to create using digital media ensures that Canadians are active contributors to digital society.</p>	<p>communicate ideas and information in a variety of oral, print and other media texts, such as short reports, talks and posters</p> <p>identify conventions and techniques appropriate to the form chosen for a media text they plan to create</p> <p>produce media texts for specific purposes and audiences, using a few simple media forms and appropriate conventions and techniques</p> <p>remix different existing digital content into something new</p> <p>understand how meaning is produced through multimedia (text, images, audio, video) and how culture is produced through the Internet and social media in particular</p>	<p>Insufficient (R)</p> <p>Beginning (1)</p> <p>Developing (2)</p> <p>Competent (3)</p> <p>Confident (4)</p>







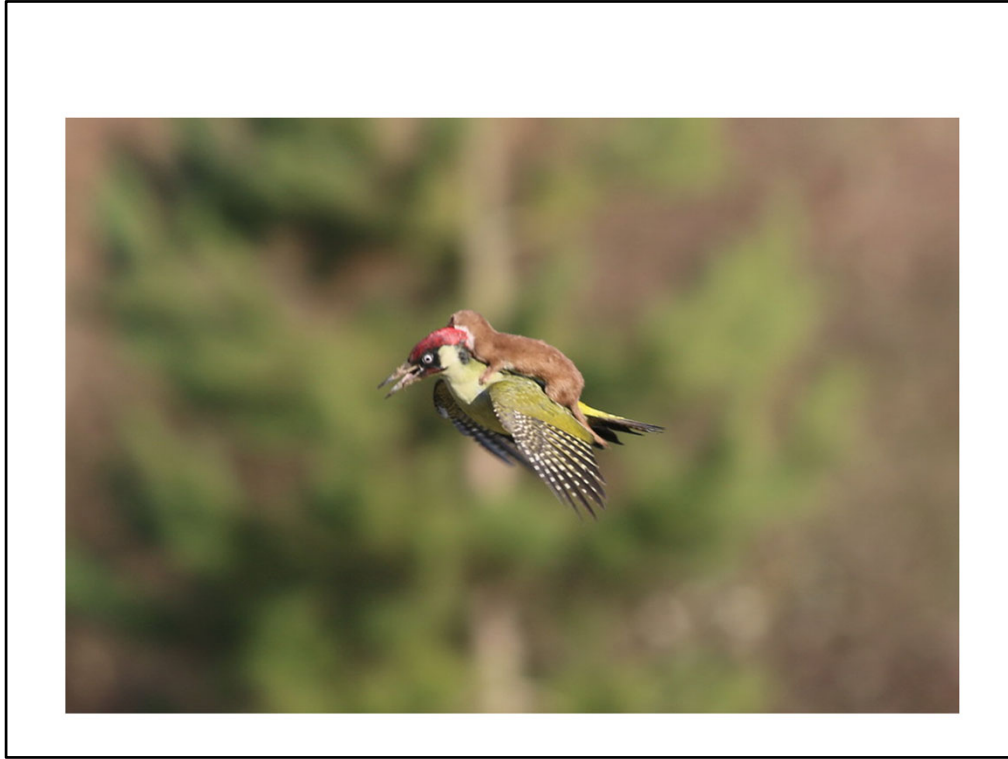










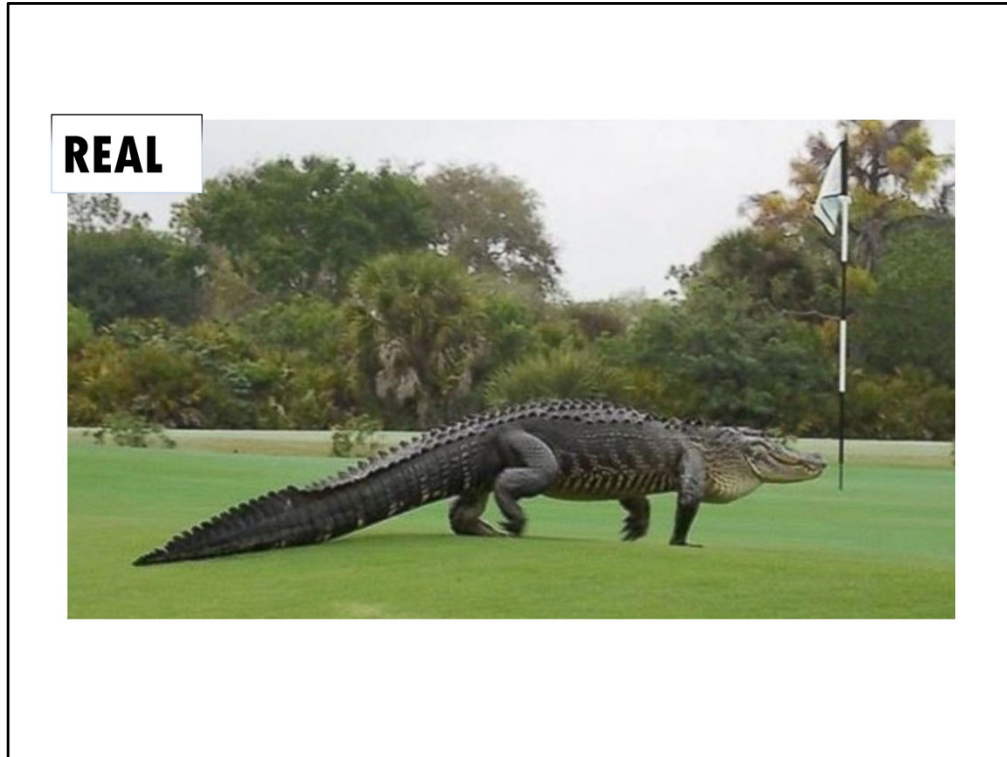


**WHICH ARE FAKE?**

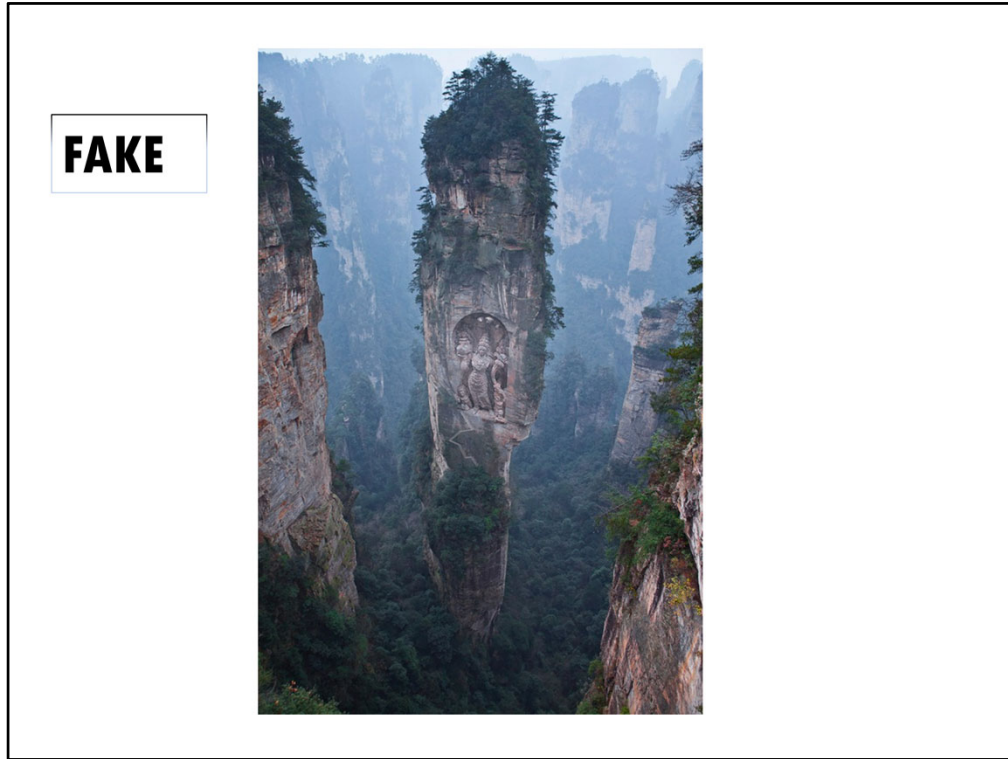
**WHICH ARE REAL?**

**HOW DO YOU KNOW?**

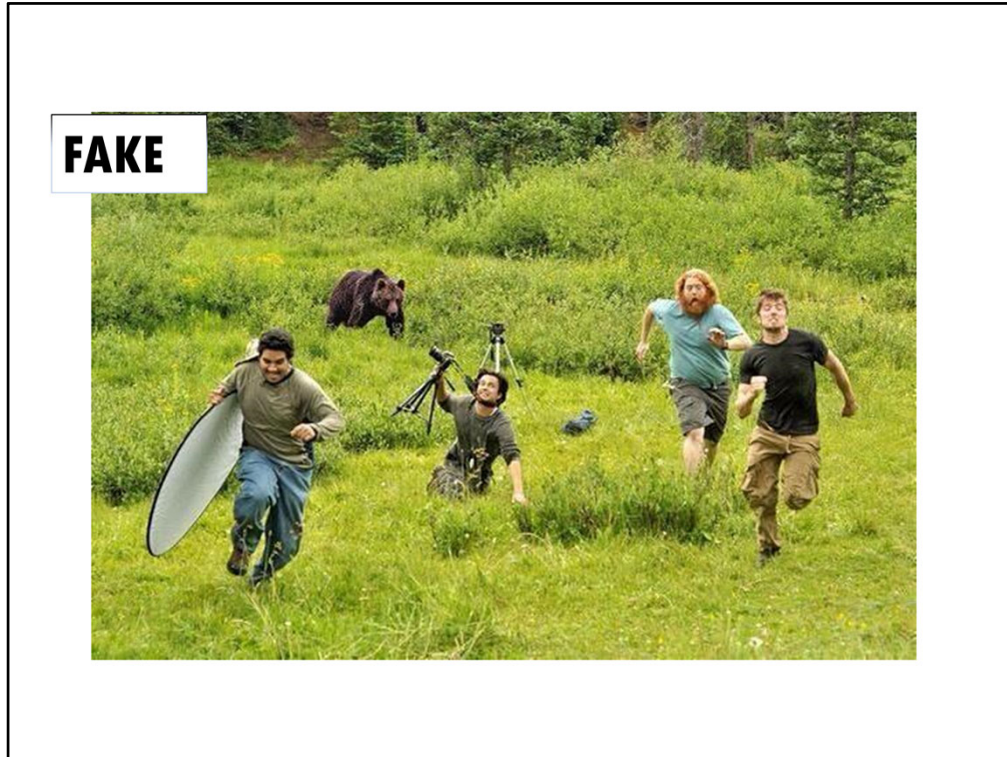




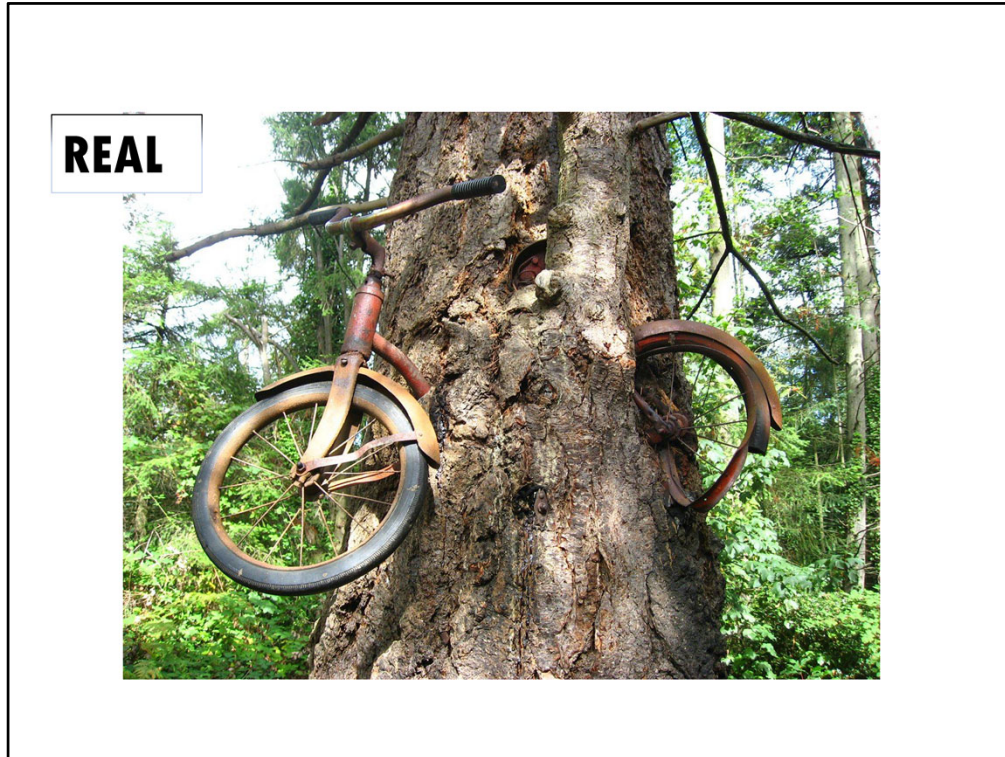
This is a real alligator, photographed on a golf course in Florida.



This mountain is real, but the statue was added by Photoshop.



This photo is entirely staged, with the bear added by Photoshop.



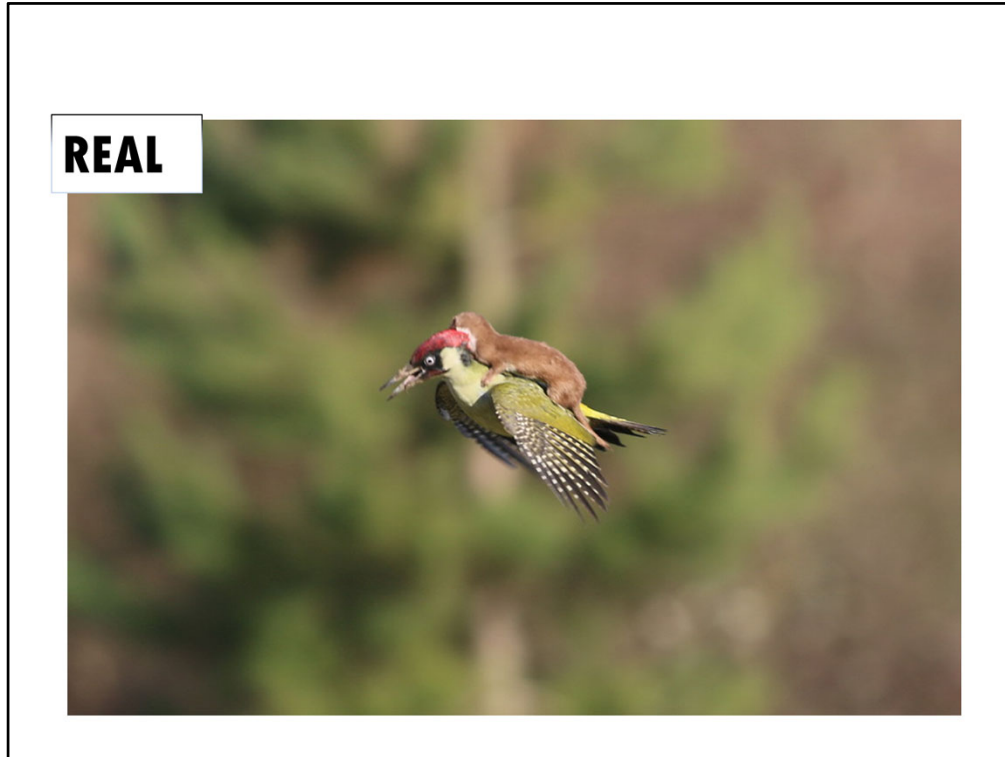
This really is a bicycle that got stuck in a tree that grew around it, in Washington state. However, many people mistakenly claim that it has been there since World War I: in fact it was left there around 1954.

**FAKE**



The tree and the piano are real – but the piano was taken apart and re-assembled around the tree by an artist.





This photo really does capture a weasel riding on the back of a woodpecker – probably in an attempt to kill it. The woodpecker threw the weasel off moments later and escaped.

**WHY DOES IT  
MATTER?**

**REAL**







This doctored photo of an Iranian missile test was released by the Iranian government.

**REAL**



**FAKE**



All the women – including German chancellor Angela Merkel – were removed from this photo when it was printed in the conservative Orthodox Israeli paper *The Announcer*.

**REAL**





This photo of a protestor in Ferguson, Missouri, was altered to spread a racist message.

**FACT-CHECK IT!**



## BuzzFeed NEWS

When a wee critter is rescued from the wild, a snug place to stay can make them feel better.



That's where Katie Deline-Ray comes in.



The 39-year-old Ontarian runs Wildlife Rescue Nests, a project that sends crocheted and knitted nests to wildlife rescue and rehabilitation centres.

**Let's dig a little deeper...**





**Questions:**

- 1. Has it been debunked already?**
- 2. Is this the original source?**
- 3. Is the original source reliable?**
- 4. What do other sources say?**

# 1. Has it been debunked already?

**A. No.**

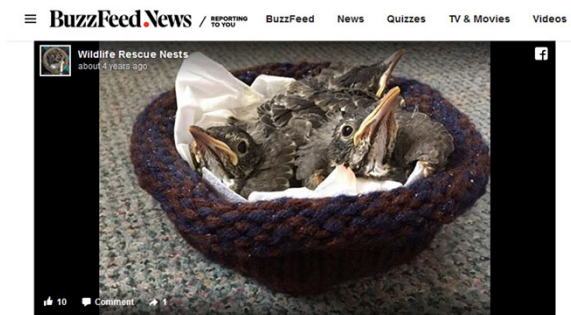
"wildlife rescue nests"

No Results

[🔍 Search for "wildlife rescue nests" on Google](#)

## 2. Is this the original source?

**A. Yes. The story links to a video made by Wildlife Rescue Nests, but no other news sources.**



The 39-year-old Ontarian runs Wildlife Rescue Nests, a project that sends crocheted and knitted nests to wildlife rescue and rehabilitation centres.

### 3. Is the original source reliable?

## BuzzFeed News. A search shows they're mostly considered a legitimate news source.

#### BuzzFeed News

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

**BuzzFeed News** is an American news website published by **BuzzFeed**. It has published a number of high-profile scoops, including the *Trump–Russia dossier*.

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3.2	Leaked Milo Yiannopoulos emails
3.3	Kevin Spacey sexual misconduct accusation
3.4	Michael Cohen story
4	Awards and recognition
5	References

#### History [edit]

*BuzzFeed News* began as a division of *BuzzFeed* in December 2011 with the appointment of **Ben Smith** as editor-in-chief. In 2013, Pulitzer Prize winner **Mark Schoofs** of *ProPublica* was hired as head of investigative reporting.<sup>[1]</sup> By 2016, BuzzFeed had 20 investigative journalists.<sup>[2]</sup> The British division of *BuzzFeed News* is headed by **Janine Gibson**, formerly of *The Guardian*.<sup>[3]</sup> Notable coverage includes a 2012 partnership with the BBC on *match-fixing* in professional tennis, and inequities in the U.S. H-2 *guest worker program*, reporting of which won a *National Magazine Award*.<sup>[4]</sup> A 2017 study in the journal *Journalism* which compared news articles by BuzzFeed and *The New York Times* found that BuzzFeed largely follows established rules of journalism. Both publications predominantly used *inverted pyramid* news format, and journalists' opinions were absent from the majority of articles of both. Both BuzzFeed and the *Times* predominately covered government and politics, and predominantly used politicians, government, and law enforcement as sources. In contrast, BuzzFeed devoted more articles to social issues such as protests and LGBT issues, more frequently quoted ordinary people, less frequently covered crime and terrorism, and had fewer articles focusing on negative aspects of an issue.<sup>[4]</sup> On July 18, 2018, *BuzzFeed News* moved from a section of the BuzzFeed site to its own domain, *BuzzFeedNews.com*,<sup>[5]</sup> with a Trending News Bar and programmatic advertisements.<sup>[6][7]</sup>

BuzzFeed News	
Screenshot <span>[show]</span>	
Type of site	News
Available in	English
Founded	November 2011; 7 years ago
Headquarters	New York City, U.S.
Owner	BuzzFeed
Key people	Ben Smith (Editor-in-chief)
Website	<a href="http://buzzfeednews.com">buzzfeednews.com</a>
Advertising	Native
Current status	Active

#### **4. What do other sources say?**

**Scrolling past Wildlife Rescue Nest's own site and Facebook page shows many references to it from other sites.**

## 4. What do other sources say?

The screenshot shows a Google search for "wildlife rescue nests". The search bar contains the text "wildlife rescue nests" and a "Search" button. Below the search bar are navigation links for All, Images, Maps, Shopping, News, More, Settings, and Tools. The search results are as follows:

- Crafting Wildlife Rescue Nests | Red Heart Blog**  
[blog.redheart.com](http://blog.redheart.com) > All Blog Posts > Charities ▾  
 Apr 14, 2016 - You can help out orphaned, sick, and injured animals by making artificial nests! Many wildlife rehabilitation groups use soft crocheted or knit ...
- Wildlife Rescue Nests pattern by Kath Webber - Ravelry**  
<https://www.ravelry.com/patterns/library/wildlife-rescue-nests/> ▾  
 Jun 8, 2016 - Wildlife Rescue Nests is a nonprofit project that provides information on animal rescue centres around the world that are in need of woolly nests ...
- You can crochet or knit wildlife rescue nests for injured or orphaned ...**  
<https://www.pinterest.ca/pin/151433606190357130/>  
 Wildlife rehabilitation centers often use hand knit and crochet "nests" to cradle orphaned and injured birds and other wildlife while they are recovering.
- Hand-Knitted Nests for Rescued Baby Animals - Wildlife Rescue Nests**  
<https://www.countryliving.com/life/kids-pets/a35704/knitted-wildlife-rescue-nests/> ▾  
 Jun 15, 2015 - Katie Deline-Ray is the founder of Wildlife Rescue Nests, a nonprofit in Ontario, Canada, that donates hand-knitted nests to over 60 wildlife ...
- Volunteers crochet 'nests' for rescued wildlife | MNN - Mother Nature ...**  
<https://www.mnn.com> > Earth Matters > Animals ▾  
 Mar 4, 2016 - Baby birds in crocheted nest. Baby birds make some noise in their crocheted nest. (Photo: Wildlife Rescue Nests/Facebook). We already know ...

**VIRAL PHOTOS:  
REAL OR FAKE?**





















**WHICH ARE FAKE?**

**WHICH ARE REAL?**

**HOW DO YOU KNOW?**



**REAL**





**FAKE**



**FAKE**





**REAL**





**FAKE**



**REAL**



**WHY DOES IT  
MATTER?**

**REAL**





**FAKE**



**REAL**



**FAKE**





**REAL**



**FAKE**



**FACT-CHECK IT!**



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When a wee critter is rescued from the wild, a snug place to stay can make them feel better.



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The 39-year-old Ontarian runs Wildlife Rescue Nests, a project that sends crocheted and knitted nests to wildlife rescue and rehabilitation centres.



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# 1. Has it been debunked already?

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---

No Results


 Search for "wildlife rescue nests" on Google

## 2. Is this the original source?

**A. Yes. The story links to a video made by Wildlife Rescue Nests, but no other news sources.**

☰ **BuzzFeed News** / REPORTING TO YOU   BuzzFeed   News   Quizzes   TV & Movies   Videos

 **Wildlife Rescue Nests**  
about 4 years ago



10   Comment   1

facebook.com

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# 3. Is the original source reliable?

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3.4 <a href="#">Michael Cohen story</a>
4 <a href="#">Awards and recognition</a>
5 <a href="#">References</a>

#### BuzzFeed News

### BuzzFeed News

Screenshot [show]

Type of site	News
Available in	<a href="#">English</a>
Founded	November 2011; 7 years ago
Headquarters	<a href="#">New York City, U.S.</a>
Owner	<a href="#">BuzzFeed</a>
Key people	<a href="#">Ben Smith</a> (Editor-in-chief)
Website	<a href="#">buzzfeednews.com</a> <span>🌐</span>
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## **4. What do other sources say?**

**Scrolling past Wildlife Rescue Nest's own site and Facebook page shows many references to it from other sites.**

# 4. What do other sources say?



"wildlife rescue nests"

Search



All



Images



Maps



Shopping



News



More

Settings

Tools

## Crafting Wildlife Rescue Nests | Red Heart Blog

[blog.redheart.com](http://blog.redheart.com) › [All Blog Posts](#) › [Charities](#) ▼

Apr 14, 2016 - You can help out orphaned, sick, and injured animals by making artificial nests! Many wildlife rehabilitation groups use soft crocheted or knit ...

## Wildlife Rescue Nests pattern by Kath Webber - Ravelry

<https://www.ravelry.com/patterns/library/wildlife-rescue-nests> ▼

Jun 8, 2016 - Wildlife Rescue Nests is a nonprofit project that provides information on animal rescue centres around the world that are in need of woolly nests ...

## You can crochet or knit wildlife rescue nests for injured or orphaned ...

<https://www.pinterest.ca/pin/151433606190357130/>

Wildlife rehabilitation centers often use hand knit and crochet "nests" to cradle orphaned and injured birds and other wildlife while they are recovering.

## Hand-Knitted Nests for Rescued Baby Animals - Wildlife Rescue Nests

<https://www.countryliving.com/life/kids-pets/a35704/knitted-wildlife-rescue-nests/> ▼

Jun 15, 2015 - Katie Deline-Ray is the founder of Wildlife Rescue Nests, a nonprofit in Ontario, Canada, that donates hand-knitted nests to over 60 wildlife ...

## Volunteers crochet 'nests' for rescued wildlife | MNN - Mother Nature ...

<https://www.mnn.com> › [Earth Matters](#) › [Animals](#) ▼

Mar 4, 2016 - Baby birds in crocheted nest. Baby birds make some noise in their crocheted nest. (Photo: Wildlife Rescue Nests/Facebook). We already know ...