

Lifestyle | Feature



France's Ambassador to the United Arab Emirates Xavier Chatel (left) stands next to a cage with mynah bird Juji, that was brought from Afghanistan by a girl fleeing the Taliban yesterday. — AFP

Rescued Afghan bird learns to say 'bonjour'

A mynah bird that was brought from Afghanistan by a girl fleeing the Taliban has learnt to say "bonjour" after finding a new home with France's ambassador to the United Arab Emirates. Ambassador Xavier Chatel said he was moved by the little girl, who arrived "exhausted" and carrying the bird, named Juji, at the Al-Dhafra airbase in the UAE during the chaotic evacuations from Kabul.

The girl was left in tears after being told she could not take her pet on the onward journey to France for "sanitary reasons", Chatel said in a series of tweets. "She had fought all the way at Kabul airport, to bring the treasured little thing with her," he wrote. "She cried silently. I was moved. I promised to take care of the bird at the residence, feed him. She could visit him anytime and take him back. I won't forget her look of desperate gratefulness."

Juji now has a "girlfriend", a dove that visits him daily, and after much coaxing finally said "bonjour"—a moment that "went straight to my heart", Chatel said. "Today, from Paris, the bird's owner, 'Alia', found me on



Mynah bird Juji, that was brought from Afghanistan by a girl fleeing the Taliban is pictured at France's ambassador to the United Arab Emirates' residence in Abu Dhabi yesterday. — AFP

Twitter. She was so happy to see her bird thus cared for," he wrote, using a pseudonym for the girl. "She wanted me to teach him French. Alia, your bird has become the embassy's mascot, but he is here for you, and if I can, I'll take him personally to you one day." — AFP

Winnie-the-Pooh bridge fetches over £130,000 at auction

A bridge depicted by author AA Milne in his children's books about honey-loving teddy bear Winnie-the-Pooh has sold at auction for more than twice its estimated price, a UK-based auctioneer said yesterday. Built in 1907 in Ashdown Forest in southern England but later replaced and restored, the bridge fetched £131,625 (\$179,167, 154,830 euros) in a sealed bid, auctioneer Summers Place Auctions said.

Originally known as Posingford Bridge, it captured the imaginations of generations of children as "Poohsticks Bridge" where the bear protagonist invented a game dropping sticks and pinecones into the water below. Milne's son Christopher Robin, who inspired the books and shared his name with the boy who joined Pooh in his adventures, played on the

bridge in the 1920s before it appeared in the books, illustrated by EH Shepard.

Though the lot attracted global bids, the bridge was ultimately claimed by local aristocrat William Sackville, whose Buckhurst Park estate is located just a short distance from where the bridge was built. Sackville, whose lands encompass the area recreated in the Pooh books as the "Hundred Acre Wood" said he was "delighted" with the purchase. "It will take pride of place on the estate close to its original position and I hope that many children (and adults) will be able to admire the original bridge which inspired one of the most famous games still played by children in the UK and abroad—'Poohsticks'," he said. — AFP



This undated handout photograph shows a wooden bridge, originally known as Posingford Bridge, that was constructed in 1907 in Ashdown Forest and which inspired Winnie the Pooh author AA Milne to write the books following a game of 'Poohsticks' with his son Christopher. — AFP

Nestle to trial plant-based eggs and shrimp

Nestle is offering plant-based alternatives to eggs and shrimp as the Swiss food giant expands its menu in the growing vegan market, the company said yesterday. Nestle, owner of everything from chocolate to coffee and baby food brands, has for several years been reorganizing its activities to focus more on health and wellness.

The Swiss company has among other things been making a major push in vegetarian and vegan products. Its latest offerings are the "vEGGie" and "Vrimp". The egg substitute is made from soy protein and omega-3 fatty acids. The product "can be scrambled like real eggs, used in a frittata and pancakes or even as an ingredient when baking cakes or cookies," the company said in a

statement. The "Vrimp" is made from mixing seaweed, peas and konjac root, and "has the authentic texture and flavor of succulent shrimps," according to Nestle.

The two products will be offered in a "test-and-learn" launch at a limited number of stores in Switzerland and Germany. The market for alternative meat and dairy amounts to \$14 billion, according to a June

study by Swiss bank Credit Suisse. The market could mushroom to a whopping \$1.4 trillion by 2050, the bank forecast. More than 600 companies, from startups to the biggest food companies, are developing such alternative foods, Credit Suisse said. — AFP