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Ancient Egyptians were the first falconers: Mummified kestrel reveals birds of prey bred and preserved in huge numbers as offering to the gods

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- 3D imaging of a mummified kestrel found it died due to forced overeating
- Scan revealed the contents of the raptor's stomach
- First evidence to point to mass breeding of raptors as offerings to gods.

By MARK PRIGG FOR DAILYMAIL.COM

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The ancient Egyptians bred birds of prey to mummify as offerings to the gods, researchers have found.

These stunning images reveal the results of CT Scans of a mummified Kestrel.

They reveal that the kestrel was force-fed its last meal - a mouse - suggesting it was kept in captivity.



© Iziko Museums/Carina Beyer

The ancient Egyptians bred birds of prey to mummify as offerings to the gods in large numbers, researchers have found.

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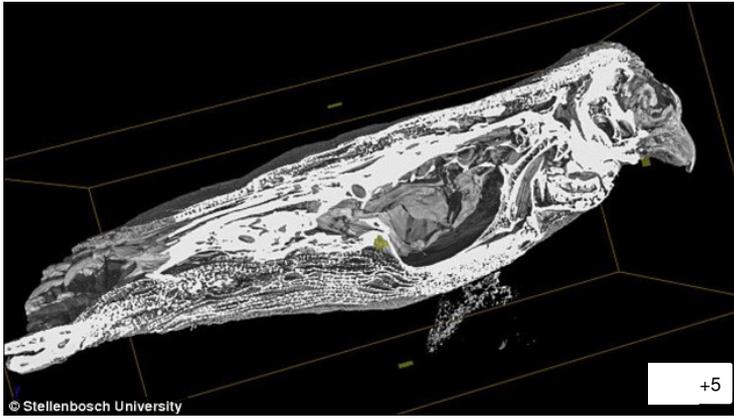
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© Stellenbosch University
Scans reveal that the kestrel was force-fed its last meal - a mouse - suggesting it was kept in captivity.

The new study, published in the Journal of Archaeological Science, is the first evidence to point to mass breeding of raptors as offerings to gods.

'The idea of birds of prey being bred to the extent of being kept and force-fed is new,' said Dr. Salima Ikram, Professor of Egyptology at the American University in Cairo and lead author of the study.

'Until now, the sheer number of raptor mummies had been a mystery - did they catch or trap them and kill them, raid nests, or find them dead?

'Our results explain why they had so many: we now think it was because of active breeding.'

The researchers behind the study, from the American University in Cairo, Stellenbosch University and the Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Studies say their findings also have implications for the use of birds of prey in falconry for hunting.

'Taken together, these factors provide, for the first time, strong evidence for the ancient Egyptians keeping such birds in captivity, with the possibility that they had also established a captive breeding program for them, favouring the offering of males over females,' they wrote.

'This would establish the possibility of a controlled large-scale breeding program for raptors in Egypt, leading to speculation about their possible use in falconry.'

ANIMAL MUMMIES IN EGYPT

Animal mummies were common in ancient Egypt and used in religious ceremonies, often as offerings.

Millions of mummified animals have been found, most dating from around 600 BC to AD 250.

Ancient Egyptians believed in many gods and associated different animals with them; raptors like kestrels were connected to the sun god Re and Egyptians believed they commanded the sky and whose coloring and eyes evoked the sun.

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Animal mummies were common in ancient Egypt and used in religious ceremonies, often as offerings.

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© Stellenbosch University
 Since the bird had not been gutted prior to mummification, they could also look into its digestive tract to see what its last meal had been. They found the tail of a young house mouse (*Mus musculus*), which appears to have caused the kestrel to choke to death. Looking further into the gizzard and stomach, they found other mouse fragments, including 27 loose teeth, suggesting that the kestrel had eaten more than one mouse earlier in the day. They also found parts of a small sparrow.

In ancient Egypt, birds used as votive offerings were prepared by being gutted and dried, then dipped into molten resin and wrapped.
 However, sometimes the birds were not gutted, giving the researchers a chance to take a glimpse into one particular bird's life before it died.
 The researchers carried out a virtual autopsy on a bird mummy from Iziko Museums of South Africa in Cape Town.
 The bird mummy, SACHM 2575, was scanned using CT imaging and the team created 3D images of the bird.



© Stellenbosch University
 The bird mummy, SACHM 2575, was scanned using CT imaging and the team created 3D images of the bird.

Based on morphology, limb measurements and beak shape, they established it was a European kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*).
 Since the bird had not been gutted prior to mummification, they could also look into its digestive tract to see what its last meal had been.
 They found the tail of a young house mouse (*Mus musculus*), which appears to have caused the kestrel to choke to death.

DRIVEN TO EXTINCTION

Animals and pets held a special significance in the afterlife for ancient Egyptians, and were buried with the dead as offerings to the gods and to help their owners in the journey to the afterlife. It is thought the animal mummy industry was so large that it almost drove certain species to extinction.
 Among the hardest hit was the Baboon, which was wiped out in Egypt by the practice. Millions of mummified animals have been found, most dating from around 600 BC to AD 250.
 Ancient Egyptians believed in many gods and associated different animals with them; raptors like kestrels were connected to the sun god Re and Egyptians believed they commanded the sky and whose coloring and eyes evoked the sun.
 Certain animals, recognizable to the priests by their markings, were thought to act as hosts for the divine spark of a particular deity.
 During its lifetime, such an animal would be worshiped and catered to as the living god; upon its death it would be buried with great pomp, amidst national mourning.
 The god's spirit would then migrate to the body of another distinctly marked animal, and the cycle would continue, as is the case with Buddhist Tibetan lamas.

imagination!

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Viewers demand Channel 4 axes The Jump: Beth Tweddle set to undergo SURGERY after breaking her back on TV's most dangerous show... as Tina Hobley exits with a broken arm



'Slayonce!': Triumphant Beyonce celebrates as she leaves the Super Bowl... as mom Tina Knowles renames her after halftime performance



Former glamour model Rhian Sugden shows off her generous assets in skimpy bikini as she enjoys a smooch with actor fiancé Oliver Mellor on beach break



Busty Amber Rose flaunts her ample assets in plunging burgundy dress as she kicks back with BFF Blac Chyna in racy video



Lady Gaga tears up as she sparkles in red suit while kicking off Super Bowl 50 with emotional National Anthem performance Passionate performance



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As part of the cult celebrating these living animal deities, votive offerings in the form of animal mummies were given, a custom that became particularly popular from c. 600 BC until the Roman era, stopping in c. AD 250.

These animal mummies were of the same species associated with the deity in question, but were not sacred themselves.

Millions of such votive mummies of cats, dogs, ibises, and raptors have been and are found in museums all over the world today.

Unlike sacred animals, which lived out their natural lives to the full extent, votive animals were sometimes put to death by strangulation, through a blow to the head, and in the case of juveniles, untimely removal from parent.

Looking further into the gizzard and stomach, they found other mouse fragments, including 27 loose teeth, suggesting that the kestrel had eaten more than one mouse earlier in the day.

They also found parts of a small sparrow.

'This was one of the most entertaining and exciting bits of research to do - when we saw how much the kestrel ate and how it choked, we suddenly had an idea about how the ancient Egyptians managed to mummify so many raptor and the implications about wild animal husbandry and the possibility of falconry being practiced in ancient Egypt,' said Prof. Ikram.



Based on morphology, limb measurements and beak shape, they established it was a European kestrel (Falco tinnunculus), the same bird that shot to fame in Ken Loach's 1969 film tKes, which tells the story of a Barnsley schoolboy who tries to escape his narrow working-class existence by looking after a young kestrel.

CCTV captures battle for nest space between kestrel & jackdaw



'We know raptors were religiously important but it's interesting to think about the role they may have had in falconry.

It's also interesting that Egyptians were exerting so much thought and control over nature and that their aptitude with wild animals is considerable.'

The findings open the door to further work to distinguish the different breeding groups by analyzing the DNA of the raptors and determining their sex.

The researchers say this will provide a deeper understanding of the role of raptors in ancient Egypt and explain how the Egyptians saw nature and their role in it.

THE SCANDAL OF EGYPT'S FAKE ANIMAL MUMMIES

Researchers claim to have uncovered a huge scandal in the Ancient Egyptian animal mummy industry after revealing a third of the religious offerings are empty.

Experts at the University of Manchester and the city's museum used X-rays and CT scans to examine the interior of 800 bundles of cloth.

They found a third were empty - and packed with mud, sticks and reeds.

A third contained well-preserved complete animals while a further third consisted of partial remains - but the rest were empty.

Scientists say those at involved in the industry may simply have struggled to keep up with demand - and packed them with mud, sticks and reeds.

Dr Lidija McKnight, an Egyptologist from the University of Manchester, told MailOnline:

documents haircut in FOURTEEN Snapchat videos... as she sings, distorts her face and refuses to sit still Striking new look



'I still am an addict': Will Young admits being addicted to porn and alcohol as he talks candidly about his sexuality Suffered 'years of shame' before coming out at 21



Naomi Campbell flaunts her enviably long legs in fishnet tights as she dons a little black dress for lingerie launch party in Milan Red carpet was her runway



'I would like to have a daughter': Elton John says he wishes he had become a father sooner as he talks about his dreams... and says he'll stop touring for his sons



'It was off the chart!' Sir Elton John reveals he once demanded a hotel manager change the weather... as he tells James Corden he 'loves it' when his kids have tantrums



Victoria Beckham's 'astronomical' Fashion Week schedule - including having just four hours' sleep and getting up at 4am to work on her designs



Caught in a (baby) shower! Pregnant Anne Hathaway displays her blossoming bump in gym wear as she shelters under an umbrella



Ariel Winter puts on a very leggy display in skimpy denim shorts as she accompanies her boyfriend Laurent to the barbers



'You can see he is excited!' David Beckham shares photo of himself taking son Brooklyn to his first Super Bowl! He's a good sport!



Mom's the word! Blue Ivy steps onto the field to support Beyonce in behind the scenes Super Bowl rehearsal pictures She gets the best access



Double date! George and Amal Clooney dine with Cindy Crawford and her husband Rande Gerber in West Hollywood A-list circle of friends



Victoria Beckham suffers rare fashion fail as she swamps her slender frame in oversized monochrome ensemble Hardly ever has an off day





© AP +5
 Researchers may have uncovered a scandal in the Ancient Egyptian animal mummy industry after revealing a third of the religious offerings are empty (file picture)

'Early excavators who unwrapped mummies on site documented that some bundles did not contain complete animals or in fact any animal at all, so this in itself is not new,' she said.
 'What this research has shown by looking at a large group is what percentage seem to contain bones and which don't.'
 'The early preconception - and for quite some time afterwards - was that these empty mummies were fakes, but we now believe that there is more likely to be much more to it.
 'She said that sometimes the linen parcels were actually padded out with items from the mummy-maker's home.

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 David Beckham holds hands with daughter Harper as wife Victoria clutches heart-shaped balloon on night out
 An affectionate family



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 War And Peace fans take to Twitter to admit 'tearing up' at moment rescued Pierre savours eating food again



Make-up free Fern Britton, 58, is barely recognisable as she dashes to the shops in unflattering rain coat and cycling shorts
 Clearly off-duty



PICTURED: Strictly champions Jay McGuinness and Aliona Vilani pictured leaving Glasgow nightclub together in the early hours



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 Katy Perry spends weekend with beau Orlando and his son Flynn, five, at children's birthday party
 Permanent fixture?



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 Cricketer Warnie's age-defying ex Simone Callahan, 45, puts on leggy display while running errands



TV's most dangerous show claims another victim: Former athlete Linford Christie is the FOURTH person forced to pull out of The Jump after injuring his hamstring



She's Queen B!
 Beyonce announces Formation world tour after Super Bowl performance
 Making her return to the global stage



She's looking Dangerous!
 Beyonce takes inspiration from Michael Jackson's look on his 1993 world tour for raunchy Super Bowl 50 performance outfit
 Spot the difference



Getting ready for the big game: Fergie treats her football-mad son Axl to a healthy snack ahead of the Super Bowl!



The Duchess of deals!
 Fergie is selling the £150,000 Bentley her close friend Geir Frantzen bought her for £33,995 because she's 'always short of cash'



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 Viewers vented anger



Chic Emma Thompson, 56, is given a run for her money by stylish daughter Gaia, 16, at Evening Standard Awards... as she dedicates award to the late Alan Rickman



Maisie Williams rocks red off-shoulder satin playsuit as she picks up Rising Star gong at the Evening Standard British Film Awards
 Looking classy



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 Tuppence Middleton stuns in daring plunging



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jael gold, east brunswick, United States, 5 months ago
 so the Egyptians were collectors. doesn't mean they did it first.

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Time keeper, Earth orbit, United Kingdom, 5 months ago
 Never understand what the Gods wanted with all those dead birds. I'd have taken cash myself.

[Click to rate](#) **3** **1**

yve, UK, United Kingdom, 5 months ago
 Sick and tired of reading that the ancients spent their whole time sacrificing things and building things for the gods. I'm sure they had better things to do.

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Marnix, Ware, United Kingdom, 5 months ago
 Of course the ancient Egyptians were the 'first Falconers' in the sense they were before us. If your up-to-date on the history of them; they were far more advanced than us in technology for starters, there's not much else they wouldn't have done that we can do. We're in the age of rediscovering, not discovering, crazy as it seems. Look into Ancient Aliens documentaries, incredible facts.

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jael gold, east brunswick, United States, 5 months ago
 don't believe everything you read. let me know when they find an MRI machine or microwave.

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jumpsuit as she leads the glamour at star-studded Evening Standard British Film Awards



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Still finding time for romance



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Stars will perform at the February 15 ceremony



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Casual yet stylish look for the game



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Don't call him the Merc With A Mouth for nothing



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A real talking point

'Team spirit!' Shanina Shaik shares her Super Bowl 50 excitement in Snapchat video which sees 'a huge tub of Gatorade dumped over her head'
Swept up in excitement



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'Night at the museum!' Katie Holmes shares a photo to Instagram while viewing artwork with her daughter Suri
A sweet and rare photo



'Your time is up': Mia Wasikowska reunites with Johnny Depp's Mad Hatter in teaser trailer for Alice Through The Looking Glass
Aired during Super Bowl



Little Mix's Perrie Edwards puts on a flirty display with handsome mystery male as she enjoys night out with bandmate Jade Thirlwall and her beau Jed Elliot



Blooming lovely! Emilia Fox is the picture of elegance in white floral bandeau gown at Evening Standard British Film Awards
Pulls out all the stops



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Rugby WAG Camilla Kerslake wows in floor-length, semi-sheer dress as she attends the Evening Standard awards
Dress for attention



What's he smoking? Justin Bieber holds suspicious-looking cigarette as he hangs out with on-again girlfriend Hailey Baldwin and pals in San Francisco



It's game time! Catherine Zeta-Jones and Michael Douglas add star power to Super Bowl 50 in San Francisco
Celebrities flocked to the Levi's Stadium



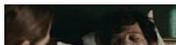
'Super Bowl Sunday on set!' Gigi Hadid gets dunked in bright orange Gatorade as she posts playful video on Snapchat
Added eye blacks



It's a knockout! Shirtless Matt Damon looks ripped as he shows his boxing skills in new Jason Bourne trailer
Screened in Super Bowl



Auntie improvises War And Peace - by cutting



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CHRISTOPHER STEVENS reviews this weekend's TV
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The 36-year-old was raised in Colorado



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'So excited to meet everyone!' Terri, Bindi and Robert Irwin record a final message as they prepare to drop into the jungle for I'm A Celebrity in Australia



Gisele Bundchen is polished to perfection in a blazer and blouse as she joins Tom Brady in the audience at the Super Bowl
Posed with excited fans



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Mowgli runs for his life



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Adele tops the poll



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Pre-game exercise! Bradley Cooper's model girlfriend Irina Shayk shows off taut tummy preparing for Super Bowl 50 blowout with spot of yoga



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Monochromatic grey



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Comfort over fashion



Dakota Johnson keeps covered up in animal print coat teamed with jeans and heeled sandals at A Bigger Splash screening
Became a household name for stripping off



Tom Parker wins in the brutal Snow Cross on his debut while Arg



crashes out of The Jump bottom first... as the show claims three victims to injury during practice



Like father, like son! Brooklyn Beckham appears to take fashion tips from his style icon dad David as the pair step out in similar laid-back attire



Drinks all round! George Clooney 'treats staff of LA hot spot to tequila' during birthday bash for wife Amal with Cindy Crawford invited Well, he does have his own brand of tequila



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'I'm very much enjoying being single!' Kate Hudson confirms she is unattached days after Nick Jonas gushed about the pair's 'unbelievable connection'



She can train anything! Jillian Michaels walks around with green parrot perched on her shoulder during family outing in Malibu



This Apple didn't fall far from the tree! Gwyneth Paltrow poses for a selfie with her mini-me daughter Child with Chris Martin is now 11



'I can't wait to sing for you all!': Lady Gaga posts makeup-free snap in bed with her dogs hours before Super Bowl performance



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Having a roo-ly good time! Kelly Osbourne goes casual while Sophie Monk dons clingy dress and heels to snap selfies with kangaroos at Zoo



Khloe Kardashian poses naked in a swimming pool... as she compares herself to Marilyn Monroe Shared the extremely racy images on Twitter



'She's not interested': Dame Helen Mirren 'refused to profit from THAT bikini snap as she would not brand herself in that way'



'Divided we fall': Superbowl trailer for Captain America Civil War shows Marvel's superheroes in dramatic face off Made the most of the captive audience



Sticking with tradition! Gwen Stefani is spotted without boyfriend Blake Shelton as she takes her sons to church in Studio City Been almost inseparable



'I've kept my mouth shut and taken the blame': Ronan Keating



says he doesn't regret affair as he defends the end of his marriage to Yvonne Connolly
Split in 2011



'I taught Cam Newton everything he knows!' John Travolta, Ashton Kutcher and Larry David recall their best Super Bowl memories in pregame video



Wet 'n' wild! Zilda Williams goes skimpy bikini shopping in Bali with Playboy bunny pal Sarah Robertson before displaying her ample DD-cup size curves by the pool



'I barely left the house': Top Gear's new host Matt LeBlanc admits he was headed for a 'nervous breakdown' after Friends as he struggled with marriage troubles



Wanna look good for you! Hilary Swank steps out in skintight black leather slacks while enjoying romantic dinner date with beau Ruben Torres



We know it's you! Margot Robbie covers her flawless blonde locks and face with a beanie and scarf while strolling the streets of New York with boyfriend Tom Ackerley



'It was a beautiful thing, to have my sisters left and right of me': Beyonce talks reuniting Destiny's Child for her 2013 Super Bowl performance ahead of Sunday's appearance



Some new ink? Sofia Vergara, 43, is a T-shirt and jeans type of woman as she visits a tattoo shop in Los Angeles
Took two friends along



Born to perform! Ellie Goulding shows off her sculpted legs in tiny leather hotpants as she hits the stage in Madrid
At Vistalegre Palace



It's a bird... It's a plane... Jasmin Walla dons Superwoman costume for indoor skydiving session with beau Ross Worswick
Making people stop and stare



Call The Midwife star Jessica Raine and husband Tom Goodman-Hill enjoy low-key amble... after hinting they would like children



Naomi Campbell cuts a striking figure as she dons knee high boots and knitted mini dress to launch her new lingerie collection



Real Housewives of Cheshire star Dawn Ward looks sensational in mustard coat, mini-skirt and knee-high boots as she steps out amid Sinitta assault court battle



Bear crushes the undead! Kung Fu Panda 3 sits on US box office top spot as Pride and Prejudice and Zombies fails to crack top five



Rolling Stones? I prefer The Kinks, says Mick Jagger's son
Just because he's your dad, you don't have to like his music



'On my feet... sort of': TV host Eamonn Holmes shares hospital snapshot following his double hip replacement surgery
On the road to recovery



Imogen Thomas cuts an understated figure in black as she and lookalike daughter Ariana attend Alvin and the Chipmunks: The Road Chip's London premiere



It's rained on her parade! Georgia May Foote falls victim to the weather as she heads out in Glasgow with Joanne Clifton ahead of Strictly tour



Woman's best friend! Lucy Watson braces against the cold as she cosies up to beloved pup Digby and boyfriend James Dunmore during cosy trip to the park



'The biggest surprise!' CBS confirms The Good Wife will end after this season with announcement in Super Bowl advert
N season eight



Emma, is that you? Stone ditches her vibrant, red tresses for a darker 'do following Beverly Hills salon visit
Upcoming role as tennis star Billie Jean King



Is Diana fashion's new muse? Alexa Chung takes style inspiration from the late Princess with 80s-inspired ruffle collars, pussybows and military jackets



She's dressed with military precision! Sharp-suited Carol Vorderman wears formal RAF uniform as she attends 75th anniversary of the Air Cadets



'I haven't felt like this since my first love': CBB's Jeremy McConnell laughs off cheating rumours as he gushes about Stephanie Davis



The world's youngest beauty icon? Princess Charlotte has a bright pink lipstick named after her in new Marc Jacobs cosmetics line



Tilda Swinton shows off her own unique sense of style as she wears bronze reflective shades with yellow knee-high boots to attend movie photocall



That dress is working overtime! Chanel Iman wears white mini that manages to show off both her chest and legs at Super Bowl bash
Quite the entrance



Going Hollywood? Game Of Thrones star Kit Harington leaves girlfriend Rose Leslie behind to hit Lure nightclub solo



Trinny Woodall looks sensational in chic white blazer as she



enjoys fun-filled date with boyfriend Charles Saatchi at favoured hot spot Scott's Al fresco lunch



Back on? Justin Bieber is spotted for first time in weeks with model Hailey Baldwin during Super Bowl festivities in San Francisco



Taking the plunge! Ashley Greene shows off her assets in low-cut sapphire gown at DirecTV Super Bowl event in San Francisco



Maisie Williams, 18, cuts a cute figure in Mickey Mouse ears as she dons a pinafore dress to explore Disneyland with a male companion



Lion Babe rocks a perilously plunging black catsuit for appearance on Channel 4's Sunday Brunch alongside a leggy Emily Atack and casually suave Laurence Fox



The (love) Force Is Strong! Daisy Ridley cuts a relaxed figure in tight denim jeans and padded jacket as she enjoys leisurely outing with boyfriend



Jeremy Clarkson lets his emotions fly into Top Gear at the football as he watches beloved Chelsea avoid last-minute defeat Cringed, screamed and finally rejoiced



Fifty shades of Gwyneth: Miss Paltrow plays cupid with her steamy Valentine's Day gift guide including 'sex dust' and a blindfold Racy tips on Goop



'I'm grateful every day for the love and light in my life': Bindi Irwin cuddles up to boyfriend Chandler Powell as she prepares to join I'm A Celebrity cast



Double act! Rebel Wilson poses backstage with fellow comedienne Sheridan Smith as pair rehearse for new West End musical Funny Girl



Can't stop, won't stop! Reality diva Kim Zolciak refuses to back down from haters as she posts yet another stunning bikini snap on Instagram



'Accidental twinsies!' Julianne Hough and Olivia Munn suffer the ultimate red carpet blunder as they sport near identical white trouser suits



Tatt's a bit racy! Kylie Jenner exposes new hip inking as she poses for alluring photod in just a hoodie and underwear New tattoo is phonetic pronunciation of 'sanity'



Sharing is caring: Thomas Cohen wears girlfriend Daisy Lowe's leather jacket with garish-print trousers to walk her dog Monty



Diamonds are a girl's best friend! Jennifer Metcalfe can't keep the



smile off her face as she goes jewellery shopping with long-term boyfriend Greg Lake



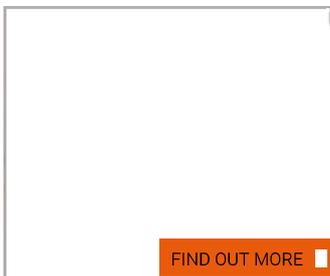
Cara Delevingne flashes her incredibly taut tummy as she take the Paris streets by storm for shopping trip with chic sister Poppy and adorable pup Leo



Playing happy families! Ben Affleck and Jennifer Garner cut relaxed figures as they reunite for a low-key outing with their children
Out in Brentwood




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GADGET REVIEWS

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It's not cheap, but the \$699 (£500) Zeppelin Wireless is perfect for the design conscious music fan.

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Samsung's Gear VR headset is pretty impressive as first-generation devices go.

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The iPad grows up: Apple's iPad Pro

The iPad Pro is, for many, a real laptop replacement - and a way to combine work and play in a gadget that will last all day and won't break your back to carry.

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'A glimpse into the future of the living room': The new Apple TV

Apple says apps are the future of TV, and while its new \$149 box does have some issues, its combination of streaming services, games and other apps make it the best way to make your TV smart.

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**'Intuitive controls and gorgeous visuals':
Heads on with PlayStation VR**

Sony's Playstation VR will go head to head with Facebook's Oculus Rift and HTC's Vive next year - Experts predict it will be a bloody battle - and Dailymail.com was able to try out the technology.

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The Blackphone 2 is fully encrypted by default and comes with a suite of secure features that let you make calls and send texts that are impossible to eavesdrop on or track.

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It's incredibly simple to set up, and we found it tripled the speed of our home wifi connection - but at \$199 is expensive..

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No more tangled wires: Powerbeats2 Wireless review

Beats by Dre's Powerbeats2 headphones have a new look - so now you can pound the treadmill, listen to your favourite tunes and make sure you're fully colour-co-ordinated.

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The best all in one wireless speaker you'll ever hear: Naim Mu-so review

It might not be a name familiar to the US market, but Naim is a legendary British brand hoping to make a splash with the American launch of its \$1499 Mu:So speaker.

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The only remote you'll ever need: Logitech's Harmony Elite works with 270,000 gadgets from TVs to speakers and lights

Harmony Elite (pictured) was unveiled at this month's IFA conference in Berlin. It works with the Bluetooth and Wi-Fi enabled Logitech Hub which connects all the devices together.

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The Mail's verdict on the Apple Watch

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