Instagram post sparks new giant waterlily find

LEVEL B2


Photo: EcoNaturalist.com / Unsplash

I. WARM-UP

1. Have you ever learned something from a social media post?
2. What is the most surprising plant or animal you know? Why?
3. How can photos help scientists make discoveries?

II. KEY VOCABULARY

species
a group of similar living things that can reproduce together

expedition
a planned journey to explore or research a place

satellite
a machine in space that takes images or sends signals to Earth

permit
an official document that gives permission to do something

indigenous
belonging to the original people of a place

endangered
at serious risk of disappearing forever

visible
able to be seen

estimate
to judge a number based on available information

III. READING

A chance Instagram post led to the discovery of a new giant waterlily in Colombia. Carlos Magdalena, a specialist at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, saw Jeremiah Harris's photo from the Inírida River in Guainía and noticed something unusual.

Harris had tagged the plant as Victoria amazonica, but that species is not native there. After securing funds, permits and partners from the Jardín Botánico in Bogotá and local indigenous reserves, Magdalena led a five-day expedition.

With only hours before their flight, the team sailed overnight through the flooded forest and found the plants on a small lake. A paper in Phytotaxa confirmed a new species, Victoria colombiana. Its leaves can reach three metres and are visible in satellite images.

Researchers estimate only 30 to 50 remain in the wild, so the species is critically endangered. Scientists used to think there were only three giant waterlily species; now there is one more.

Reading text adapted from reporting by **The Guardian***: "How a plant selfie in Colombian jungle led...". Original article linked at theenglishwire.com.*

IV. COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Who posted the photo that started the discovery?
2. Which expert recognised the plant might be unusual?
3. Where in Colombia were the plants finally found?
4. What confirmed the plant as a new species?
5. How many plants are estimated to remain in the wild?

V. DISCUSSION

1. Should social media play a bigger role in research? Why or why not?
2. How should Colombia protect this endangered species?
3. What risks do expeditions in remote places face?
4. What would make a discovery feel truly amazing to you?

VI. GRAMMAR FOCUS

Used to / would

Use used to / would for past habits: used to + base verb or would + base verb. For past states (be, know, have), use used to, not would.

> *"Scientists* **used to think** *there were only three giant waterlily species."*
>
> *"As a trainee at Kew, a botanist* **would check** *leaves daily."*

VII. GRAMMAR EXERCISE

Complete each sentence with used to or would + the verb.

1. Every summer, my grandfather (grow) ___ lilies in his pond. _____
2. As a child, I (love) ___ photos of giant waterlilies. _____
3. Before the internet, plant lovers (send) ___ photos by post. _____
4. When I was young, our town (have) ___ a botanical garden. _____
5. Years ago, my parents (visit) ___ a lily lake every spring. _____

Teacher's Notes

TEACHERS ONLY

These notes are designed to help you get the most out of this lesson. Please do not share this page with students.


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I. LESSON GUIDE

- Timing: 8–10 minutes warm-up, 10 minutes vocabulary, 12–15 minutes reading and comprehension, 8–10 minutes grammar, 10 minutes discussion.
- Pre-teach names and places (Kew Gardens, Inírida River, Bogotá) and check pronunciation of species and indigenous before reading.
- Do one skim read for who/where/what, then a detail read (permits, expedition length, the estimate). Pair-check answers before whole-class feedback.
- Extension/differentiation: stronger students create a five-step timeline of the discovery; others match key nouns to definitions before questions.

II. DISCUSSION FACILITATION TIPS

1. Start with a quick poll, then pair students to give one benefit and one risk of using social media.
2. Board protection ideas (laws, reserves, funding); ask pairs to choose and justify one action.
3. Elicit examples (weather, permits, health); have groups rank the risks from highest to lowest.
4. Have students share a past moment of surprise and explain why; prompt for vivid details.

III. EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

Writing: In pairs, write a 70-word museum label introducing Victoria colombiana to visitors.

Presentation: In groups of three, prepare a 90-second brief on how the team planned the expedition.

IV. ANSWER KEY OVERVIEW

Comprehension questions: short factual answers from the text.

Grammar exercise: Used to / would

Discussion: open-ended. Accept any reasonable ideas supported by examples and reasoning.

Answer Key

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These answers are for teachers only. Please do not share this page with students.


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IV. COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Who posted the photo that started the discovery?
   Jeremiah Harris.
2. Which expert recognised the plant might be unusual?
   Carlos Magdalena of Kew Gardens.
3. Where in Colombia were the plants finally found?
   On a small lake, reached by sailing overnight through the flooded forest.
4. What confirmed the plant as a new species?
   A paper published in the journal Phytotaxa.
5. How many plants are estimated to remain in the wild?
   Between 30 and 50.

V. DISCUSSION

Open answers. Accept any reasonable ideas supported by examples and reasoning.

VI. GRAMMAR FOCUS

Key point: Use used to / would for past habits: used to + base verb or would + base verb. For past states (be, know, have), use used to, not would. (Example 2 constructed.)

"Scientists **used to think** *there were only three giant waterlily species."*

"As a trainee at Kew, a botanist **would check** *leaves daily."*

VII. GRAMMAR EXERCISE

Complete each sentence with used to or would + the verb.

1. Every summer, my grandfather ___ lilies in his pond. **used to/would grow**
2. As a child, I ___ photos of giant waterlilies. **used to love**
3. Before the internet, plant lovers ___ photos by post. **used to/would send**
4. When I was young, our town ___ a botanical garden. **used to have**
5. Years ago, my parents ___ a lily lake every spring. **used to/would visit**