

Library battles beetles to save 100,000 old books

17th July 2025



Tens of thousands of antique books are in danger. They are being eaten by beetles. The centuries-old books are being taken off the shelves of a library in a medieval abbey in Hungary. Pannonhalma Abbey was founded in the year 996. It is four

years older than the Kingdom of Hungary. One of the books in danger is a complete Bible from the 13th century. There are also hundreds of manuscripts from before the invention of the printing press in the mid-15th century. Library staff are carefully putting the books and manuscripts in wooden boxes. The boxes are being sealed in large plastic sacks. The oxygen has been removed from the sacks. After six weeks without oxygen, all of the beetles should be dead.

The insect eating the priceless books is the drugstore beetle, also known as the bread beetle. It usually feeds on dried foodstuff, like wheat, flour and spices. The bugs like to eat the gelatin and starch-based glue that are used to make books. Library workers realized something was wrong when they found lots of dust on the bookshelves. The librarians then found holes in the books. These were caused by the beetles chewing through the paper. The person in charge of getting rid of the beetles said: "We've never encountered such a degree of infection before." She explained she felt a lot of responsibility for saving the books. She said if a book is ruined, "a piece of culture has been lost".

Sources: yahoo.com / foxnews.com / sarajevotimes.com

Writing

We should not kill creatures to save books. Discuss.

Chat

Talk about these words from the article.

antique book / in danger / beetles / library / Hungary / Bible / printing press / oxygen / books / bugs / glue / bookshelves / paper / holes / infection / responsibility / culture

True / False

- 1) The article says beetles are eating hundreds of thousands of books. T / F
- 2) The books are in a bookstore in Hungary. T / F
- 3) People are putting the books in plastic bags and removing the oxygen. T / F
- 4) The article said it should take about six weeks to kill the beetles. T / F
- 5) The article says the beetle is often found in drugstores. T / F
- 6) The beetle usually eats things like spices and flour. T / F
- 7) The beetles were discovered because of lots of dust on bookshelves. T / F
- 8) A librarian said if culture is ruined, a book is lost. T / F

Synonym Match

(The words in **bold** are from the news article.)

- | | |
|-----------------------|--------------|
| 1. antique | a. staff |
| 2. founded | b. documents |
| 3. in danger | c. munching |
| 4. manuscripts | d. eats |
| 5. removed | e. old |
| 6. feeds on | f. taken out |
| 7. workers | g. met |
| 8. chewing | h. started |
| 9. encountered | i. destroyed |
| 10. ruined | j. at risk |

Discussion – Student A

- a) What do you think of books?
- b) How important are libraries?
- c) Should we do everything we can to protect old books?
- d) What's the oldest book you have?
- e) How did the printing press change the world?
- f) Has an insect ever damaged something of yours?
- g) What is the best way to protect very old books?
- h) Is killing the beetles the best solution in this story?

Phrase Match

1. Tens of thousands of antique
 2. the shelves
 3. the invention of
 4. The boxes are being sealed
 5. after six weeks
 6. It usually feeds
 7. workers realized
 8. they found lots of
 9. The person in charge of getting rid
 10. she felt a lot of responsibility
- a. something was wrong
 - b. in large plastic sacks
 - c. on dried foodstuff
 - d. of a library
 - e. of the beetles
 - f. without oxygen
 - g. books are in danger
 - h. for saving the books
 - i. the printing press
 - j. dust

Discussion – Student B

- a) What do you think about what you read?
- b) What do you think of antique books?
- c) Would you like to be a librarian?
- d) How would you feel if insects were chewing through your things?
- e) How important are books to you?
- f) Are paper books or digital books best?
- g) What is the most important book in your country's culture?
- h) What questions would you like to ask a librarian?

Spelling

1. Tens of thousands of tguneai books
2. books are being taken off the hvesles
3. a complete Bible from the 13th unryect
4. before the ietnoinnv of the printing press
5. rlaibyr staff
6. After six weeks without noeyxg
7. The insect eating the celrsieps books
8. eat the gelatin and starch-based uegl
9. workers lzieeard something was wrong
10. beetles gnihcew through the paper
11. such a degree of noiifcetn
12. she felt a lot of borspsnyiteili

Answers – Synonym Match

1. e	2. h	3. j	4. b	5. f
6. d	7. a	8. c	9. g	10. i

Comprehension Questions

Listen to / read the news article. Answer these questions.
(Answers are on p. 27 of the 27-page PDF.)

1.	How many books does the article say are in danger?
2.	What was created four years after Pannonhalma Abbey was founded?
3.	When was the printing press invented?
4.	What will workers put wooden boxes in?
5.	How long will it take to kill the beetles?
6.	What is the drugstore beetle also known as?
7.	What does the drugstore beetle usually eat besides wheat and flour?
8.	What did library staff find lots of on library shelves?
9.	What did a member of the library staff feel a responsibility for?
10.	What did the staff member say was lost if a book was ruined?

Speaking – Books

Rank these with your partner. Put the best books at the top. Change partners often and share your rankings.

- Novels
- Cookery books
- Travel guides
- Encyclopaedia
- Atlases
- History books
- Comics and manga
- Grammar books

Answers – True False

1	F	2	F	3	T	4	T	5	F	6	T	7	T	8	F
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Answers to Phrase Match and Spelling are in the text.