

## The story of Laika, the first animal in space

It is the year 1957. A stray dog is wandering the streets of Moscow and sniffing rubbish when she is suddenly picked up by strong hands and taken to her new home, the Moscow space research center. Laika (the Russian word for barker), as the scientists call the small mongrel, has no understanding why she is brought there.

After the success of their first satellite, Sputnik 1, the Soviet government is eager to launch another space craft to show their power to the world. This time, the space craft will contain a living being.

Laika is trained for her space travel: she is kept in smaller and smaller cages, where she cannot move, to get used to the washing machine sized cabin in Sputnik 2. She is put into machines that spin very fast to get used to the extreme acceleration of a rocket launch.



*Laika during her space training program.*



*Laika getting used to her small capsule.*

On 3 November 1957, Laika is harnessed into the space capsule and launched into orbit in Sputnik 2.

Monitors record her life signs during her travel; but the plan for Laika is not to stay alive: Sputnik 2 is not designed to return. After a few days in space and Laika in will be given poisonous food by a machine. However, this never happens. Later Moscow space center will announce to the media that the brave little dog died because of lack of oxygen.

It took almost 50 years until the sad truth was revealed. Today, we know that the monitors showed that Laika was extremely stressed when she was launched into space. She did not understand what was happening to her, and there was no one there to calm her. The terrified dog died a painful death within a few hours because of her stress and the terrible heat in the space capsule, because the cooling system did not work.



*Laika's space suit.*



*Sputnik 2 model.*

Since Laika's famous mission there have been worldwide debates over the use of animals in space. Still, after Laika, more animals were sent into space. After humans landed on the moon in 1969, animals no longer made the headlines. However, space craft still carry various animals, including monkeys, rabbits, turtles, insects, spiders, fish, jellyfish, amoebae and algae.

In an interview in 1998, Oleg Gazenko, a leading scientist in the Soviet animals-in-space-program in the 1950ies and 60ies admitted that many scientists later regretted that they had made the animals, and especially Laika, suffer. He said, "The more time passes, the more I'm sorry about it. We shouldn't have done it ... We didn't learn enough from this mission to justify the death of a dog."

Photos:

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