

The World Around Us



"Foreign Correspondent"
Michael Ludwig reports on the some strange goings on in the natural world.



Odyssey of the Rubber Duckies

In 1992 a container of bathtub toys headed for the USA spilled off a cargo vessel during a storm. Since then the yellow duckies, beavers, turtles and frogs have provided a view of the global circulation of the ocean. The escape occurred near the 45th parallel and the ducks floated northward along the Alaskan coast, reaching the Bering Strait in 1995. The gallant little seafarers circled the North Pacific in three years, visiting Alaska, Russia, South Korea, Japan and then returned to North America. A breakaway group visited the Hawaiian Islands. The main flock was trapped in slow moving ice for several years - it took them until 2000 to reach the Atlantic Ocean. But, in 2001, they were sighted in the area of the north Atlantic where the Titanic sank.

During their recent travels, some of the ducks broke away from the flock and headed for Europe. Their global journey is almost over and thousands of other duckies are expected to wash up on the coast of New England, USA in the near future. No information is available on the fate of the beavers, frogs and other escapees. If you find one of the ducks on your beach, it may be part of our flock!



Invading Asian Carp Pose An Unusual Threat

Four species of imported Asian carp have been escaping from fish farms in the southern US. The escapees are a major ecological problem, but it is the fish's reaction to noise that is making news. Unlike common carp, the grass, silver, bighead and black carp are not bottom-feeders, they feed near the surface. And, they can grow very large, regularly reaching a weight of more than 25 kilos. The problem; the carp are easily startled, can leap 2 or more metres out of the water in reaction to noise and do not check to see where they're going. For boaters, the flying carp pose a serious airborne threat. When was the last time you were hit with a flying fish? However, the fish do taste good!

Darwin's Tortoise!

A zoo in Australia, owned by the crocodile hunter Steve Irwin, is home to one of the oldest known animals in the world. Harriet the tortoise, who will turn 176 this year was believed to have been brought to Australia by the famous scientist Charles Darwin in 1835 an incredible 171 years ago! Harriet is a Giant Galapagos Land Tortoise named after the Islands off South America where Darwin found her. She is said to be fit and healthy and it is hoped she will live for many more years.



Exploding Toads

Last spring, in Germany, veterinarians were baffled when eye witnesses had reported toads that had apparently 'blown up' in a garden pond. Many suggestions were given as to why the toads had been found dead like this. Some thought it was poison and others thought it may be a disease. It is however, believed to be an attack carried out by crows while the toads were 'puffed up'. When frightened they fill their bodies up with air so as to make themselves look larger and thereby frighten off any predators. To find out for sure if this is indeed the cause, vets will have to go back to the same pond this spring to see for themselves if it happens again!



Whale Tusk Investigations

Scientists in San Diego in America have proved that the tusk of the narwhal is in fact a sense organ. The 9 foot long tusk is soft on the outside and hard on the inside and has millions of nerves running from the outside of its tusk up to its brain. Scientists carried out investigations on samples of narwhal tusk and on a captured narwhal. It is believed that the whale uses the tusk to detect changes in temperature and pressure in the water around the Arctic where it lives.



© 2006 Sherkin Island Marine Station & its licensors. All rights reserved.