



The World Around Us



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

Ballycroy National Park Fires

The 11,000 hectare Ballycroy National Park in Co. Mayo is special because of its blanket bog (see Nature's Web - Autumn 2012). This bog started developing after the last ice age. This April, the park had three days of devastating fire that engulfed large parts of blanket bog and heath. It was the first fire there in 40 years. Around 3000 ha of the Park were burnt along with another 2000 ha outside the park. The fire was so hot that it instantly destroyed lichens, mosses and liverworts that were unique to the habitat. Other species affected include frogs, lizards, and icky invertebrates such as beetles and spiders (food for birds). Now what should be larks, pipits and other moorland birds singing, all you hear as you walk is the crunch under foot of burnt plants. Everyone must wait to see how the park will recover.

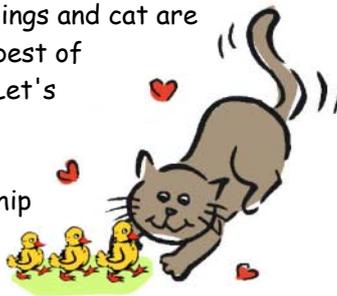


Firefighters tackling the fire in Ballycroy National Park.

Image courtesy of NPWS/Irene O'Brien

The cat that got the..... ducklings?

Ronan and Emma Lally from a small farm in Clara, Co Offaly, contacted the Mooney Show on RTE 1 recently to tell presenter Derek Mooney about a most peculiar event - their cat had adopted three baby ducklings! Ronan and Emma had bought duck eggs from a local lady and hatched them under a brood hen. The ducklings soon disappeared and it was feared that "The White Cat" as it is called, had taken them. Well it had, but only so that the ducklings could cuddle up with her newborn kittens! They were even spotted suckling on the cat. Weeks later, the ducklings and cat are still the best of friends. Let's hope this unlikely relationship continue!



Comet Pan-STARRS in Irish Skies

One of the brightest comets seen in the night sky over Ireland was visible from March to May this year. The comet was first discovered in June 2011 by astronomers using the Pan-STARRS survey telescope, which sits on top of the Haleakala volcano in Hawaii, so they named it "Comet Pan-STARRS". Comets are usually made of rocks and ice. This comet had quite a bit of dust compared to other comets and dust reflects sunlight. As the dust was swept off it made Pan-STARRS really visible and possible to see with the naked eye. By analysing the amount of dust and gas coming from the comet, scientists were able to estimate that the comet was 1 km in diameter, a fairly typical size for a comet. But that extra dust made it look bigger.



A close-up view of Comet Pan-STARRS using a telephoto lens from Sherkin Island.

Image courtesy of Robbie Murphy

Running with the Animals!

One of the most popular night time foot races in Ireland is The Cheetah Run 4 Mile Road Race. It goes through Fota Wildlife Park in Co. Cork. This year registration for the race sold out in just 2 hours and 40 minutes. The reason why it sold out so fast is that the participants get a chance to run alongside wild animals. This year's event was a big success and an internet sensation with footage of ostriches and zebras giving the athletes a run for their money! Check it out on: <http://www.fotawildlife.ie/blog/cheetah-run-4-mile-race-2013>.



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