



The World Around Us



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

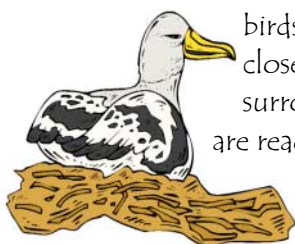


Killing Elephants for Ivory

Some distressing items are on display at Dublin Zoo. Confiscated ivory jewellery and the elephant tusks used for making them are presented to raise public awareness of the plight of animals that grow ivory. Ivory teeth and tusks are made from the dentine of animals such as the elephant, hippopotamus, walrus, and narwhal. Illegally killed for their ivory, these species are rapidly disappearing. There is still illegal trading of ivory even though the ivory growing animals are protected by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) signed by more than 170 nations. The illegal pieces now on display at the zoo were seized at Dublin Airport. The zoo's Director, Leo Oosterweghel says that illegal...poaching threatens these animals very existence and steps must be taken to protect them. In 1970 there were about 400,000 wild African elephants, but by 2006 there were only 10,000 and the situation is worsening. Somehow killing a 4.5 tonne animal to make a couple of necklaces and matching earrings just isn't right.

Sleepy Head

Scientists are always interested in studying animal behaviour. Dr. Guy Beauchamp (University of Montreal, Canada) has been studying groups of Ring-billed and Herring gulls in the Bay of Fundy for the last two summers. Instead of falling into a deep sleep, he found that the birds sometimes interrupt their sleep to take quick peeks at their neighbours. Other times they sleep with one eye open so they can constantly scan the group. They do this to mimic their immediate neighbour's behaviour. If their neighbours are alert the gulls don't rest as much and are more aware, but if their neighbours are relaxed, then so are they. Dr. Beauchamp believes that this mimicking may help



birds if predators are close by. If surrounding birds are ready to take flight then it's better if they are too!



What a Picture!

Are you interested in wildlife photography? Well, if you are, then check out the Best Wild Animal Pictures of 2009 on London's Natural History Museum's website: <http://www.nhm.ac.uk/visit-us/whats-on/temporary-exhibitions/wpy/index.jsp>.

There are some stunning images, particularly the winning entry "The Storybook Wolf", which is of an Iberian wolf leaping over a farm gate.

40,000 year old dung heaps!

On the southern tip of Africa is the Western Cape mountain range. Researchers there are searching the mountains for very unusual specimens - fossilised dung heaps! The dung heaps are produced by the Rock Hyrax, which is also known as the Rock Rabbit. These animals are little like guinea pigs, with small ears and tails. They occur in large groups and are often seen basking in the sun at the top of the mountain. So why are they so interested in the dung heaps? Well, these dung heaps are like time-capsules. They contain excrement, hair, dust, pollen and urine (the urine hardens and acts like glue, holding everything together). Layers of dung have built up over thousands of years and each layer holds important information on the climate and vegetation of that period in time. Some dung heaps are up to 40,000 years old! Researchers use this information to build a picture of how the climate and surroundings have changed over the years.



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