



The World Around Us



Animal Breath....



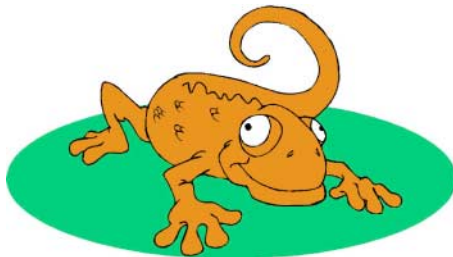
"Foreign Correspondent"
Michael Ludwig reports on some strange goings on in the natural world.

Scientists in the University of Haifa, Israel, have discovered that warm, humid mammal breath can cause insects feeding on plants to keel over and drop to the ground. It is thought that the warm breath is a warning to the insects that the animal is about to eat the plant. In order to save themselves, they quickly drop to the ground to avoid being eaten. It seems some animals don't like others breathing on their dinner!



... and Deodorant for Birds?!

Smelly birds in New Zealand may soon have their own deodorant to help protect them from introduced predators. There are many species of bird native to New Zealand but there are no native land mammals. Scientists found that the birds are easy prey for the introduced cats, stoats and other flesh eaters because they have unique body odours that make them easy to find. For example, the kiwi bird, a national symbol of New Zealand, smells like mushrooms or ammonia. These predators are causing a serious decline in native bird populations. Scientists say that in the future they may be able to design a deodorant that will mask the birds' distinctive smell and help protect them. However, getting it on them may be difficult!



Rarities on the Menu

In a small diner in rural Vietnam, a Vietnamese reptile scientist came across something unusual in the window and on the menu – a full tank of a previous unknown species of lizard. What first attracted his attention was the fact that they were all females. He contacted a colleague of his who made a two-day journey to the diner, only to find on his arrival that they had all been cooked for lunch! Local children were hired to track down as many lizards as they could find and they came back with over 60 of them. It emerged that the lizards were a new lineage of life and that the reptiles were all females and clones of their mother, having reproduced by self-fertilisation. This ability is rare but not unheard of. Some species of lizard and fish are able to self-fertilise, especially during unfavourable environmental conditions. Though the lizard was new to the scientific world, it was familiar to hungry diners for hundreds of years.

Mass Whale Stranding in Donegal

On 6th November a mass stranding of 33 Long-finned Pilot Whales were discovered on Rutland Island, Co Donegal – sadly all were dead. Scientists from the Irish Whale and Dolphin Group and the Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology, together with the help of NPWS Conservation Rangers, recorded the length and gender of each whale. They also obtained photographs to see if they could match them to whales seen the previous week in Scottish waters. Out of a total 33 pilot whales, 19 were female, 12 were male and there was one calf which was also male. One animal was not sexed as it was covered with sand. The maximum length of the whales varied from 2.3m to 5.8m. For further information visit www.iwdg.ie.



No Christmas Tree for Rudolph?

In the US Christmas tree growers often have a tough time keeping deer away from their crops. Male deer harm the trees by thrashing their horns (to mark their territory) and eating the buds and shoots off young trees. Sometimes the damage is so bad that farmers lose their crop. Individuals who have one or two trees growing in their backyard have used such things as hair clippings, cayenne pepper and raw eggs to ward off the deer but this is a little impractical for farmers who have acres and acres of trees. Researchers from North Carolina State University have found that a mixture of dried blood and egg powder (usually used to flavour pet food) sprayed on to the trees is a much cheaper solution but just as effective as more expensive options (such as fencing and commercial deer repellent). The deer do not like the taste of the mixture and the smell of blood also acts as a deterrent.

