



The World Around Us



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

A Scuba-diving Fly!

For many years scientists have been fascinated by small flies that feed and lay eggs in a lake near Yosemite National Park in the USA. Though it is a freshwater lake, Mono Lake is three times saltier than the ocean. It is also full of sodium carbonate and borax, a substance similar to washing detergent. Algae and bacteria thrive in the lake but vertebrates do not, so without fear of being attacked by predators, the only hurdle for the Mono Lake Fly had to overcome was to find a way of protecting itself from the unfriendly environment. For many years people have been fascinated to know how it achieves this and the answer has finally been uncovered. Scientists Michael Dickinson and Floris van Breugel have discovered that wax on the fly's hairier than average body is very effective at repelling carbonate-rich water, a phenomenon which creates a protective bubble of air around the Mono Lake Fly's body as it enters the water. This, along with its large claws, means it can move around the lake without difficulty or even getting wet.



Storm Ophelia

Storm Ophelia was an unusual storm that hit Ireland. It was named Ophelia by the US National Hurricane Center when they began tracking it as a possible tropical storm in the eastern Atlantic Ocean. Tropical storms like this which usually begin near Cape Verde, which is off the African coast. They typically travel westwards, across the Atlantic Ocean and while some make landfall in the Americas, many fizzle out. However, as this storm developed it moved north eastwards and turned into the strongest hurricane in the eastern Atlantic in a century and a half. Thankfully as it moved closer to Ireland it hit cooler water and weakened into a less dangerous tropical storm. On Monday 16th October, Storm Ophelia hit the southwest coast of Ireland. Sadly three people lost their lives in Ireland because of the storm. A red alert from Met Éireann and the response of the State national emergency co-ordination centre helped to ensure this number was not higher.



Image courtesy of NOAA

Uluru will close to climbers in October 2019

The Board of Management of the Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park, in Central Australia, have decided to close the climb to the top of Uluru on 26th October 2019. Uluru (previously known as Ayers Rock), is one of the most recognisable and famous landmarks in Australia. It has huge cultural significance for Aborigines, Australia's indigenous people. The Aborigines are the traditional owners of the park and have used the area for tens of thousands of years. They now manage the park alongside Parks Australia and want to protect their native heritage by stopping people climbing Uluru. Each year more than 250,000 people visit the park from all around the world. It is a World Heritage Area and is 450 km from Alice Spring, the nearest major town.



A New Heritage Ireland Website

Heritage Ireland have launched a new website for their Heritage in Schools scheme. As well as being able to make an online booking for any of the 145 Heritage Specialists who visit primary schools throughout the country, the website provides a range of classroom resources like teaching children to build a giant nest, create a butterfly garden or make their own family tree.

The Scheme is open to all primary schools nationwide. You can visit the site at www.heritageinschools.ie.



Image courtesy of NASA

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