



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



"SUPERGOOSE"

The BBC television show "Autumnwatch" is being funded by the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust and BBC, to follow 10 specially equipped, Light-bellied Brent Geese on their annual flight of over 8,000 km as they complete a migration cycle between Ireland and Canada and back. The Brent "Supergoose" flies at an average of 60-70 km/h and makes continuous flights of 1,000-1,500 km at a time! To enable these Super geese to make the gruelling 8,000 km round trip it is essential for their body to be in tip-top condition. Brent Geese food items are high in fat (for energy) and protein (increasing flight muscle mass). They have to eat lots of plants and grasses to get the required nutrients for migration, so in Iceland they feed for 15 or more hours per day. On their perilous migration from the Arctic Tundra, over the Greenland Icecap and on to Ireland then back again, the tagged geese will be monitored by satellites. The tracking program will help us understand their habits and behaviours. You can follow their path by logging onto www.wwt.org.uk/supergoose. The geese face many dangers and hazards, from treacherous storms to hunter's guns and hungry wolves. Will they all make it? Their transcontinental flight is a part of the lifecycle of this species and Mother Nature has taught her flock every trick in the book. The geese can predict weather, ride the wind to save energy and find food along the way. Think about their skills when you want a snack. Every year these geese embark on this amazing trip taking them to remote and hazardous regions.

New Species of Bird found in India

Almost 60 years after discovering the last new species of bird in India, a professional astronomer has discovered a new member of the babbler family. The very strikingly coloured bird, Bugun Liocichla, was found in remote north-eastern India. Two of the new species were caught, studied, described and released. Ramana Athreya, who discovered the bird said "With today's modern technology, we could gather all the information we needed to confirm it as a new species in short order. They took feathers and photographs, and recorded the bird's song."



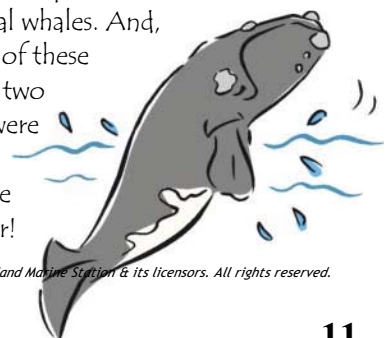
Red Squirrels under threat in the UK



Researchers studying the red squirrel and its diseases have found that one disease "squirrel poxvirus" is doing great harm to the squirrel community and could wipe them out in some regions of northern England in less than 10 years. Before this discovery, the red squirrel's main threat was the grey squirrel, which was introduced from North America over 100 years ago. The virus does not appear to affect the grey squirrel but is fatal to red squirrels if they become infected. This research highlights the urgency for finding ways to protect the red squirrel and to stop the spread of the squirrel poxvirus.

Scoop on Whale Poop!

Disgusting as it sounds, the poop of the Right Whale is proving to be the most valuable stuff floating around the Atlantic Ocean. Scientists say that the colourful and foul-smelling faecal material can give researchers many insights into the whales. It can show us if a whale is pregnant or nursing. It can also reveal stress levels, the presence of parasites, the health of the pooper and if the whale has been exposed to poisons. DNA tests are being developed to try and match "lumps" with individual whales. And, who have the scientists enlisted to sniff out the location of these smelly "sea muffins" but sniffer dogs! Bob and Fargo are two pooches that didn't adapt well to drug-sniffing so they were retrained to help the researchers at the New England Aquarium in Massachusetts, USA. Since 2003, they have help collect nearly 300 samples! Ah, love that sea odour!



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