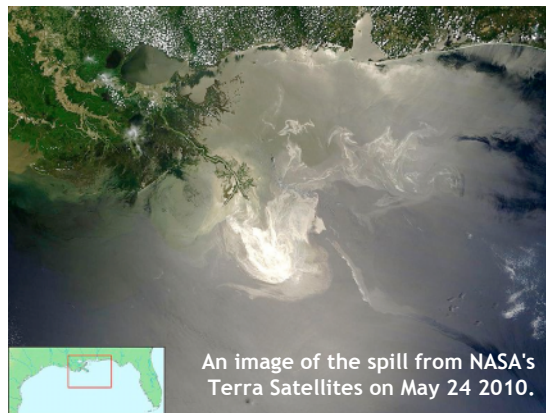




"Foreign Correspondent"
Michael Ludwig reports on some strange goings on in the natural world.

Huge Oil Spill in the Gulf of Mexico

On 20th April 2010 a huge explosion on a drilling rig in the Gulf of Mexico, started the biggest ever offshore oil spill. Sadly, 11 people were killed and 17 others were injured in the explosion and sinking of the Deepwater Horizon drilling rig. Following the explosion, the owners of the well were unable to stop the oil flowing from the damaged drill hole until July 15th, 87 days later. From April to July, nearly 5 million barrels of oil flowed out of the well, resulting in an oil slick covering at least 6,500 km². Huge underwater plumes of oil, not visible on the surface, were also created. The oil spill has had an impact on marine life and wildlife along the coasts of New Orleans, Louisiana and Florida. It has also had a terrible effect on fishing and tourism. No one knows how long it will take for the area and the organisms to recover and how much long-term damage there will be.



Courtesy of NASA

An image of the spill from NASA's Terra Satellites on May 24 2010.

Red Hot Seeds in Freezing Vault

In Svalbard, deep inside a mountain in the frozen Arctic, is a giant safety deposit box for seeds! The vault preserves seeds from as many variety of crops as possible. Should there be a crop failure the stored seeds will be available to help restore crop production after such a future disaster. In July, the vault received a "hot" delivery - chilli pepper seeds from the US. Some of the pepper varieties are heirlooms still farmed by elderly Native American farmers in New Mexico. They provided the seeds to Native Seeds Search, a US government organisation working with Native American communities. Also included in the delivery were soy, melon and sorghum seeds. Sorghum is an important part of the diet of 500 million people in over 30 countries. The crop is used for flour, bread, animal feed, beer and also as a fuel. Since it opened in 2008, the vault has obtained seeds from more than half a million of the planet's crops!

Whale Onboard!

Paloma Werner and Ralph Mothes were sailing near Robben Island, off Cape Town, South Africa, when they had a whale watching experience they will never forget! In July 2010, while enjoying a sail in their 10m yacht "Intrepid", they noticed a southern right whale slapping its tail and lunging out of the water (breaching) about 100m away. When it reappeared it was only 20m from their yacht. The sailors presumed it would swim under the boat and Paloma rushed to the other side to see it emerging - but it didn't. Instead it leapt out of the water and crashed down on the deck of the boat. Luckily no one was injured, but they did get quite a shock! The boat is made of steel so it only suffered damage to its mast and rigging.

Thankfully the whale appeared unhurt and just swam away.



A Good News Story for a Peregrine Falcon

On April 26th a badly injured Peregrine Falcon was found in a sea cave in Ferriter's Cove, Ballyferriter, Co. Kerry. The male bird of prey was rescued by two BirdWatch Ireland supporters (West Kerry Branch) and Pascal Walsh, a falconer from Farranfore in Kerry. A serious injury on its wing was heavily infected with pus and there was wing feather and tendon damage. Over the next two months Pascal treated the bird and, though wild, it became accustomed to his hands and care. As well as healing the wound, the bird needed to be restored to full fitness with daily exercise and appropriate feeding. This took a lot of hard work on Pascal's part but it paid off. On 20th June, the fully healed peregrine was released back into the wild. Even though it was hard to let the falcon go, his friends were delighted to see the bird flying off into the distance.

Courtesy of Jill Crosher



Pascal releasing the bird.