



"Foreign Correspondent"
Michael Ludwig reports
on interesting news from
the natural world.



The Fin Whale in Baltimore, Co. Cork – the sadder side to the cycle of life

In the middle of August there was a flurry of excitement in Baltimore when a young female fin whale swam into shallow water by the pier. The excitement soon turned to sadness when it became clear that the whale was not in good health and dying. Given its location, little could be done to put it out of its misery, except hope that its end would be painless. After a few days it died and that created an education opportunity. By sinking and holding the carcass on the seafloor with weights, other marine animals can feed on the tissue and leave the skeleton. If that happens, perhaps it could be displayed in Baltimore sometime in the future? For further information visit the Irish Whale and Dolphin Group website at www.iwdg.ie

Can you help find the Goose Barnacle?

Researchers from the Ryan Institute at NUI Galway are looking for help to find a rare barnacle that occasionally washes up on Irish shores. Barnacles have an amazing ability to attach themselves to every surface imaginable - even non-stick frying pans. The researchers want to study how the glue that barnacles produce works. They hope that synthetic versions of this natural underwater super-glue could be used for such things as surgery and dentistry. The barnacle that the researchers wish to study is the goose barnacle (*Lepas anatifera*), which lives offshore and is very difficult to find. However, these barnacles sometimes wash ashore and the researchers would like to collect them before they die from being stranded on the shore. Live specimens in a Lab aquarium let the researchers study these glue makers. If you come across these barnacles, alive, on the Irish coast, please put them in some ocean water and contact the researchers at the Department of Zoology, NUI Galway on 091 493191 or email < j.jonker1@nuigalway.ie >.



How would you like to be Spiderman?

Perhaps you can! Gecko lizards can run up walls and across shiny objects without falling. The secret lies in the skin on their feet. Now researchers at the University of Massachusetts have developed an artificial Gecko foot covering. It works like an adhesive but with a surprise. It sticks to almost anything but a simple twist releases it from the surface and it doesn't leave a mark when removed. A postcard-sized piece supports up to 3,175 kg, more than enough to let a person scale walls with ease.



Goodbye Lonesome George

Lonesome George of the Galapagos National Park, and known as the rarest creature in the world, died in June. George was the symbol of the Park, a unique Archipelago of islands and organisms. Estimated to be about 100 years old, George was a Pinta Island Tortoise, thought to be the last of his subspecies. The subspecies is now believed to be extinct because no one can find another one. Scientists did try to mate George with closely related females but, though eggs were produced, they were infertile. Charles Darwin studied the islands' unique animals and plants for his theory of evolution.

