



The World Around Us



“Foreign Correspondent”
Michael Ludwig reports on
some interesting goings on
in the natural world.

Footprints in the Sand— from 313 million years ago!

Scientists have recently published details of tetrapod footprints, formed about 313 million years old in the Grand Canyon National Park, USA. As well as being the oldest fossilized animal tracks in the Grand Canyon, they are the earliest evidence of a vertebrate’s footprints in sand dunes. They were discovered by a Norwegian geology professor, Allan Krill, who was hiking in the area with his students. The fossil footprints were on a boulder, which at some point had fallen off a nearby cliff. The rock in this cliff had formed in a period known as the Manakacha Formation.



What is unusual about the footprints is that they were formed in sand. Its thought a large reptile-type animal crawled over coastal sand dunes. Moist air could have dampened the sand and set the footprints in place. Later dry sand must have blown into the tracks and buried them and over time layers formed above the tracks, compacting them into rock over millions of year.

Did you know that here are tetrapod footprint tracks in Ireland? They can be found on Valentia Island, Co. Kerry, and are between 350 and 370 million years ago!



A Hero Rat

The African giant pouched rat has a remarkable sense of smell. The global non-profit charity APOPO has helped train some of them to detect landmines in Cambodia—landmines which were buried in the 1980s and 1990s during conflicts. Nicknamed HeroRATs, these rats can detect the scent of the explosive chemicals used in landmines and to alert their handlers to them. One HeroRAT in particular, Magawa, has been awarded a PSDA Gold Medal for his work. The medal is awards to animals that demonstrate “life-saving bravery and devotion to duty.” So far Magawa has discovered 39 landmines and 28 items of unexploded ordnance and has helped clear land equivalent in size to 20 football pitches, making it safe for local people.

No Knead to Waste It!

Ireland’s Environmental Protection Agency has found that bread is Ireland’s most wasted food, with 41% of people reporting they throw away bread. The main reasons for waste are food passing its Use-By date and forgetting to eat leftovers in time. After bread; vegetables, fruit and salad are the foods that are thrown out most often in the home. During the Covid-19 lockdown, 29% of people reported wasting less food. To find out more information about the survey, check out: <http://www.epa.ie/waste/nwpp/foodwasteprevention/>



A Fashion Conscious Fox!

A man living in Berlin’s Zehlendorf neighbourhood could not understand why one of his new shoes had disappeared from his doorstep. On investigating, he found that others in the area were also missing shoes. When a fox was spotted with two flip-flops in its mouth, Christian Meyer followed the fox into a bushy area and eventually discovered over 100 shoes, some just lightly chewed. It must be a fox with a real interest in fashion!



Unexpected Blooms

Bees are vital for pollination and the National Pollinator Plan encourages us all to do what we can to encourage bees into our gardens. Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT) signed up to the plan and have designated various pieces of land as pollinator areas. They have limited how often these areas are mown and have let them turn into meadow. This has given wild flowers the chance to grow. Because of this initiative, a horticulture student Sean Deane discovered a rare bee orchid growing in one of the meadows this summer. These orchids tend to appear in areas where mowing has been reduced.

As part of their course, horticulture students are learning about the importance of land management. Yvonne Grace, a lecturer at the WIT said the discovery of the bee orchid was proof of how quickly nature can bounce back, when allowed.

There’s no better way to learn something than to see it in action.



image courtesy of Robbie Murphy