



The World Around Us



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



Smart Elephants

It seems there may be more to an elephant's brain than a long memory, the BBC has reported. Studies of the elephants in Amboseli National Park in Kenya, have found that elephant matriarchs (the head female) can learn to recognise the voices of at least 100 elephants. The researchers (from the University of Sussex in the UK) are also setting out to discover if the elephants can recognise the difference between certain human languages but it is still too early to tell. Another survey in Japan has discovered that elephants are also good at numbers and can perform better than monkeys, apes and even human children when it comes to recognising the difference between larger numbers of objects, such as the difference between five and six items.

Hardy Frogs in West Cork!

Checking out www.biology.ie, we have discovered that the frogs in West Cork seem to be some of the hardiest! Despite the really cold weather, the first sighting of frog spawn again this year was in Timoleague, Co. Cork. www.biology.ie is a great place to record wildlife sightings – have a look for yourself!



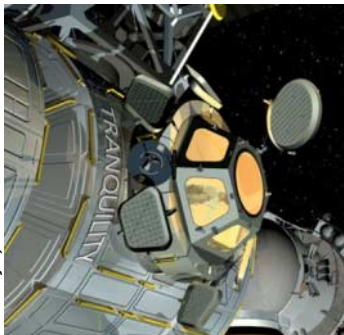
Humpback Whales Seen Breaching off Hook Head, Co Wexford



There was great excitement at the end of January when members of the Irish Whale and Dolphin Group (IWDG) not only saw, but managed to video, a Humpback Whale breaching so close to the Irish coast. Seen at Hook Head, Co. Wexford, the whale was nicknamed "Hook", for obvious reasons. It stayed in the area for a number of weeks and, along with 3-4 fins whales, could be even be seen from land. Scientists are not really sure why whales breach. It may be that they are communicating with other whales or trying to attract a mate. They may also be warning off vessels or other males, or just cooling off. Whales and dolphins are protected animals and it is really important to follow strict guidelines if you encounter such animals. These guidelines are available on the IWDG website (www.iwdg.ie), where you can also read more about the humpback's activities.

A Room with a View

Most of us would need a carpenter to install a new window, but it's not easy to get a carpenter in space! The International Space Station has just installed a brand new observation deck, which will give the astronauts a 360-degree views of Earth, outer space and the space station. Up until now, astronauts have only been able to view the Earth through small portholes.



Courtesy of NASA

Two astronauts used a giant robotic arm to move the observation deck into place. Costing \$27 Million the domed "eye-pod" was installed in early February.

Lost on the Ice

Webcams can transmit video images over the internet as they are happening. Many cities and scenic places have them, allowing people to watch events as they unfold on their computers, even if they are on the other side of the world.

A woman sitting at a computer in western Germany, was admiring the sunset at the resort of St Peter-Ording, 500km away on the northern tip of Germany. She noticed a flashing light and realised that a person was lost on the ice. She alerted the police, who were able to guide him to safety.

The stranded person was an amateur photographer who had wandered out on the frozen sea to take a picture of the setting sun. When darkness fell, he became disorientated and couldn't find the coastline again because it was covered in snow. Using his pocket torch, he began flashing the light, hoping to alert someone. Luckily for him, it was such a wonderful sunset and someone was watching 500 km away!

