



The World Around Us



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

Apples fall from the sky!

In the middle of December 2011, a small town in Coventry, England, got a big surprise when over 100 small green apples suddenly fell out of the sky, landing on startled drivers and bringing cars to a standstill. No one knows where the apples came from but meteorologists think they were picked up into the sky by an air vortex or mini tornado. When the wind velocity slowed and the apples got too heavy to hold they fell like raindrops on the unsuspecting motorists. I wonder if a local gardener didn't think that someone had robbed his or her apples? This isn't the first strange "rain" in the UK. Great Yarmouth, in Norfolk, had a fish fall in 2007, and frogs came down in 1996 in Llandewi in Wales.



Courtesy of Robbie Murphy

Baltimore's New Lifeboat

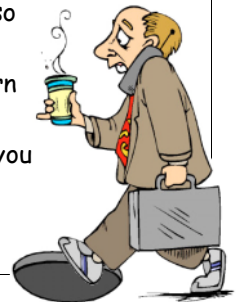
On 15th February 2012, a new Tamar Class lifeboat arrived in Baltimore, Co. Cork. The lifeboat, called

the "Alan Massey", will replace the "Hilda Jarrett" a Tyne class lifeboat, which has served Baltimore since 1988. The new lifeboat is 16.3 metres in length with a maximum speed of 25 knots compared to the 14.3 metres of the "Hilda Jarrett", which has a maximum speed of 18 knots. The new lifeboat is self-righting and is equipped with electronic systems that allow the crew to monitor, operate and control the lifeboat from their seats.

www.baltimorelifeboat.ie

The hazards of texting!

In Ireland it is against the law to driving while holding a mobile phone. The reason for this is that it disrupts your concentration when you should be focused on driving. Now scientists in Stony Brook University in New York have found that talking and texting on a mobile phone while walking can also disrupt your gait (or pattern of walking), so much so that you could have an accident!



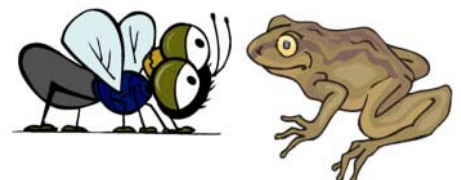
Magnetic Attraction!

Scientists from the University of Bristol, UK, have invented the first magnetic soap. They have discovered a way of putting iron in the centre of soap particles so that the soap becomes sensitive to magnetic fields. Soap is one of the main ways of cleaning oil spills in the sea and of cleaning oil off animals and plants - the soap loosens the oil bonds (just like using washing up liquid in an oily frying pan). Unfortunately, soap is a combination of things that can harm the environment. Magnetic soap could help us clean up spills then be lifted out of sensitive environments once it has done its cleaning job. Ideally however, it's best that our environment is not polluted in the first place!



The world's tiniest frog

Can you imagine a frog the same size as a house fly? Well, scientists have found one! It has a long scientific name - *Paedophryne amauensis* - and it lives on Papua New Guinea's rain forest floor, amid the leaf litter. The scientists who found it, Christopher Austin and Eric Rittmeyer from Louisiana State University in the USA, search for frogs by listening for their calls. These are incredibly high-pitched and hard for humans to hear and locate. Eventually they grabbed a bunch of leaf litter and put it in a plastic bag and when they searched the contents they saw the frog hopping off a leaf. The "new" frog is a great jumper and can jump 30 times longer than its body. This discovery makes the frog the world's smallest known vertebrate.



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