



The World Around Us



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

The World's Largest Bee

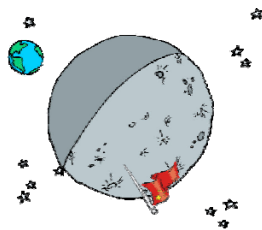
The world's largest bee is the Wallace's Giant Bee. The bee measures 3.5 cm, about three times larger than a European honeybee, and has a wingspan of over 6 cm. Female bees make their homes in termite mounds, lining their nests with sticky tree resin to keep termites out. Native to Indonesia, Wallace's Giant Bee is named after Alfred Russel Wallace, who first discovered one on the Indonesian island of Bacan in 1858. Researchers last saw one of these bees in 1981 and since then, scientists feared that this bee had become extinct.



However, this January a Wallace's Giant Bee was spotted and photographed by photographer Clay Bolt on one of the Maluku Islands in Indonesia. Little is known about this giant of a bee, which is called *Megachile pluto* in the scientific world, and scientists are now searching other locations for the bee, to learn more about it.

China lands on far side of the moon

In early January 2019, China made an historic landing on the far side of the moon. The spacecraft "Chang'e-4" not only has experiments on board but, along with a rover, will



explore the environment and surface of the moon. The far side of the moon is much rougher than the side that faces Earth, with many deep craters, and scientists are keen to learn more about it. Because that side of the moon permanently faces away from Earth, China first sent up a satellite called "Queqiao (Magpie Bridge)" to halo-orbit the moon. This satellite enabled messages to be relayed between "Chang'e-4" and Earth.

In this harsh environment, scientists have already managed to sprout a cotton plant, which they had sent up in a special canister. However, success was short-lived as night time temperatures plummeted to -170°C , killing the plant. Night time on that side of the moon actually lasts for two weeks. Daytime temperatures go to the other extreme and rise to about 120°C . The moon doesn't have an atmosphere to lessen these extremes. Unlike here on Earth. We look forward to hearing more about "Chang'e-4" and its experiments and explorations.

Early sightings of Portuguese Man o' war



In recent years, Ireland had a high number of sightings of the Portuguese Man o' War. This jellyfish-like organism can deliver an extremely painful sting. Though we are only a few months into the new year, there have already been sightings of Portuguese Man o' war on Irish beaches, particularly in the southwest coast. Be vigilant if you visit the beach any time soon.

Using up one of its Nine Lives

You may well have heard that cats have nine lives. Well, Fluffy, a cat in Montana, USA, certainly used up one of those! Fluffy is an indoor-outdoor cat and in a recent extremely cold spell, they found her covered in chunks of snow and ice after she failed to return home. An injury had immobilised her and then the cold had set in. Luckily, Fluffy was still alive and they immediately brought her to the vet where they discovered her body temperature was well below 32°C , the lowest setting on the vet's thermometer. They immediately began to warm her up and within an hour, she was showing signs of recovery. Fluffy was indeed a lucky cat!



A Tight Squeeze!

Rescue workers in Bensheim, a town in central Germany, had an unusual call-out recently. A rat had misjudged its waist size when it was squeezing through a hole in the cover of a manhole and unfortunately for the rat, it got stuck! Rats use their whiskers to gauge whether or not they will fit through a space. Usually, they can twist their bodies through small spaces but not this time! The local fire brigade and Wildlife Animal Control worked together to free the rat and sent it back down the manhole.

