



The World Around Us



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

The Witch’s Yew Tree—A Winning Tree

The Witch’s Yew Tree in the grounds of Blarney Castle, Blarney, Co Cork, has been nominated for European Tree of the Year 2020. In 2019, this specimen tree was voted Ireland’s Tree of the Year. The ancient Witch’s Yew Tree is situated on the grounds of Blarney Castle Estate in Co. Cork and is believed to be 600 years old. Situated in the Rock Close Garden, the tree sits on a natural outcrop of limestone on top of the Witch’s Kitchen. Legend has it that it’s home to the Blarney Witch who first told mortals about the Blarney Stone and its ability to grant the gift of eloquence—or as some say “the gift of the gab”.



The competition in Ireland is organised by the Tree Council of Ireland and the Irish Tree Society. The competition for the European Tree of the Year is organised by the Czech Environmental Partnership Foundation. The winner will be announced on 17th March 2020. <https://www.treeoftheyear.org/vote>



Image courtesy of NASA

Australian Wildfires

For over six months, since last September, devastating wildfires burned in the southeast coast of Australia. These fires destroyed millions of acres of forest and burned towns and suburbs and tragically resulted in the loss of life. Sadly, other casualties of the fires were the animals. Researchers are estimating that more than 1 billion animals may have perished. The Australian government set up the Wildlife and

Threatened Species Bushfire Recovery Expert Panel to help with a recovery plan. They have now identified 113 species of animal that need urgent help because of loss in numbers and loss of habitat. This list of species includes: 13 bird, 20 reptile, 5 invertebrate, 19 mammal, 22 crayfish and 17 fish. Some are these are critically endangered. The government have so far pledge AUSS\$50m to wildlife and habitat recovery.

It’s Raining Iguanas?!

The state of Florida in the USA is known for its warm weather. On occasion, however, temperatures do drop, resulting in unusual warnings from the National Weather Service — that frozen iguanas are expected to fall!

Iguanas are cold-blooded animals, which means they get their energy from the warmth of the Sun. When temperatures begin to cool, they become less mobile and can lose their grip on trees, falling to the ground. If temperatures drop enough their bodies freeze but they can cope with these conditions. They keep breathing and their main body functions still work. Once the weather warms again, they thaw out and get back to basking in the sun. However, if temperatures stay cold for too long, iguanas can die.

Iguanas can grow up with 5 feet in length so a frozen iguana falling from a tree can be dangerous, hence the warnings!



Cappabue Rapping for Climate Change

The very talented pupils of Cappabue NS, Keakil, Bantry, Co Cork, with support from GMC beats, have written and recorded a rap music video for climate change. The rap song is called “One Small Change” is gripping. You can check it out at www.cappabue.ie



A “Bloom” of Ladybirds

In June 2019, meteorologists at the National Weather Service in Southern California noticed something strange on their radar. Even though it had been a relatively clear day and no rain was expected, a big green blob appeared on the radar. They called a local weather spotter that lived near where the blob was located and asked them to have a look outside. They discovered a giant “bloom” of ladybirds, about 10 miles wide, flying a mile above the ground. It is believed the species of ladybird responsible for the bloom was the convergent lady beetle (*Hippodamia convergens*). They are plentiful in California and are welcome guests in gardens as they eat pests. They are also a migratory ladybird, leaving the Californian valleys when temperatures rise, to move to the cooler mountains.



A Swarm of a different kind

In recent months, East Africa has been plagued with huge swarms of desert locusts. These insects, which are related to the grasshopper, have two phases of life. In one phase, they live on their own, but in the other phase, known as the gregarious phase, they come together in thick swarms and move as one unit. They can travel great distances, hungrily eating as they move, destroying vegetation, including crops. These recent swarms, caused by extremes in weather, are the worst invasion of desert locusts in the Horn of Africa in 25 years and in Kenya for 70 years. The UN’s Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) estimated one swarm in Kenya at around 2,400 square kilometres. It could contain approximately 200 billion locusts.

