

# Nature's Web

Issue No. 9

Spring 2008

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Photo courtesy of www.pdphoto.org

## *Spring has Sprung!*



There are no sheep on Sherkin Island but around now lambs are being born in many parts of the country. It is a real sign that Spring has arrived. In Ireland, Spring also brings St. Patrick's Day, on 17th March. This is the feast day of our patron saint, Saint Patrick, and it is also a national holiday. Saint Patrick has made a couple of things famous in

Ireland and around the world. One is Shamrock, which we wear with pride on the feast day. You can learn why Saint Patrick made Shamrock so famous on page 6. The other thing linked to Saint Patrick is the fact that Ireland doesn't have any snakes. On page 5 you can read about the life of snakes and once you have read about some dangerous ones on page 12, you'll be quite happy that Saint Patrick banished them!

With buds about to burst and the grass starting to grow again, Ireland is turning greener by the day. And that's another thing for which we are famous. On Saint Patrick's Day, many places around the world celebrate with us and they show their support by wearing green. Some even go as far as colouring their rivers, such as the Chicago River in March 2005! (see photo)



Photo courtesy of Knowledge Seeker

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# Editor's Page

## A Whale of a Time!

There was great excitement in West Cork at the end of 2007. We're used to the sight of seals, and dolphins now and then, but imagine seeing whales! Over a few weeks, a number of whales were sighted off Baltimore, Sherkin Island and Cape Clear Island. We were lucky enough to see them and they were both an amazing and frightening sight.

They were huge! Our brother Robbie, was waiting with his camera once again and got a great picture of a fin whale passing by the beacon in Baltimore.



Photo: © Robbie Murphy

## Welcome to the Spring Edition of Nature's Web!

Dear Reader,



Welcome everyone to the spring issue of Nature's Web. This issue we are focusing on St Patrick's Day and things connected with it, such as shamrock and snakes. Edward Bourke highlights the wonderful marine life, often present around ship wrecks and Jim Wilson gives us an insight into his work. After a recent visit to the Antarctic, he explains the differences in seasons. Check out nature news from around the world on page 11 and enjoy a giggle with the jokes on page 13.

We would love to hear your views and comments and suggestions for future articles. Have a good read!

Susan & Audrey

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## Oystercatchers that DO eat oysters!

While reading up about oystercatchers and their diet for our piece on page 3, we discovered that though oystercatchers eat oysters, they don't eat a lot of them. However, we showed the article to our brothers, who happen to farm oysters, and they disagreed with us! They have found that oystercatchers like to eat *their* oysters!

Our brothers grow the oysters in mesh bags (bags with holes in them). The holes in the bags were big enough for the oystercatchers to poke their beaks through. The oystercatchers learned that if they repeatedly pecked through the holes (and because the bags held the oysters in place) they could make a hole in the oyster shells and eat their meat. And what did our brothers do to stop them - they got mesh bags with small holes! It goes to show that, unlike the oystercatchers, everything isn't black and white!



# CHEESY WHITE FISH



Photo: © BIM

### What you need:

- 4 x white fish portions - boned
- Salt and freshly milled black pepper
- Topping
- 4 dessertspoons mayonnaise
- 100g grated cheese
- 2 spring onions or bunch of chives - finely chopped
- 2 tomatoes - finely chopped

### What to do:

- Season fish with salt and pepper
- Mix ingredients for topping and spread over fish
- Bake in preheated oven at 200° C/ 400°F/ Gas mark 6 for 15 minutes or until fish is cooked through

Or

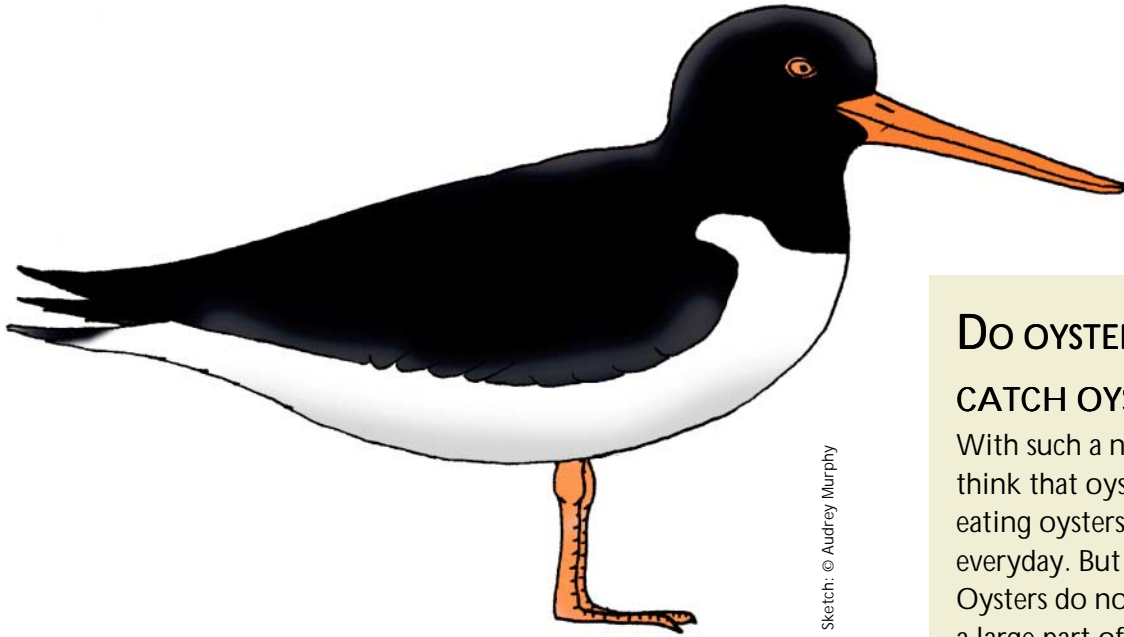
- Grill fish under a medium heat for 5-6 minutes
- Turn, spread with topping, continue to grill until topping is golden and fish is cooked through

### To Serve

Serve with salad or potato wedges.

Serves 4

Brought to you by BIM. For more fish recipes visit [www.bim.ie](http://www.bim.ie)



Sketch: © Audrey Murphy

### DO OYSTERCATCHERS CATCH OYSTERS?

With such a name, you would think that oystercatchers are eating oysters all day, everyday. But that is not so. Oysters do not normally form a large part of their diet as the oyster's shell is extremely difficult to prise open.



# Oystercatchers

**Latin:** *Haematopus ostralegus*

**Irish:** Roilleach

**T**he oystercatcher is a wading bird that usually gathers in large, often noisy flocks on rocky and sandy shores and on mudflats. Resident in Ireland all year round, it is also a winter visitor from Iceland

and the Faeroes. Its black and white plumage, orange beak and reddish-pink legs make it very easy to identify. The strong bill digs deep for worms and it is able to open shells, either by hammering them or prising them open.

To build a nest the female oystercatcher lines a scrape in the

sand, gravel or grass with shells and pebbles. If danger approaches the nest and young, the oystercatcher flies around drawing attention to its self by calling loudly to distract the predator away.

## Fact File

**Colour:** Black and white plumage, pink legs, long orange bill, red eyes with an orange ring around them.

**Length:** 39-44 cm

**Diet:** Worms and shellfish such as mussels.

**Habitat:** Flat beaches, estuaries, coastal farms and fields.

**No. of eggs:** 2-3



Photo courtesy of Ijmuiden CC-BY-SA-2.5

Large numbers of oystercatchers can be seen in Ireland from September to March, on all coastal habitats.



# Giant Squid

### Monsters of the Deep!

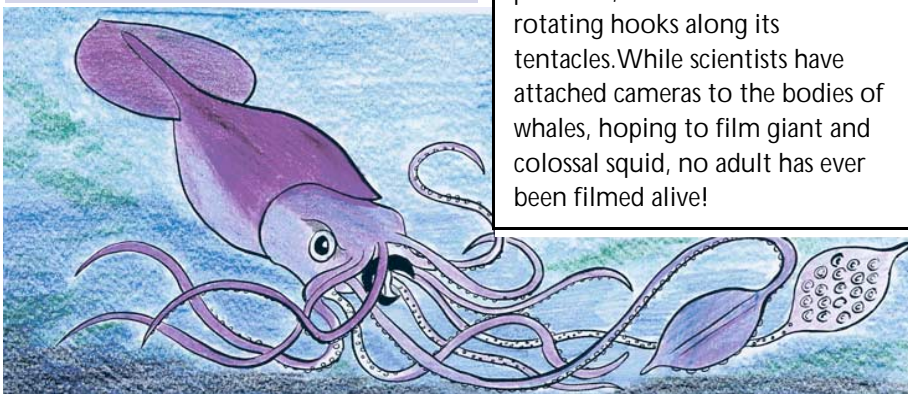
The giant squid, or *Architeuthis*, has been cast as the villain in a number of classic tales, including Jules Verne's masterpiece *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, where it attacks Captain Nemo's submarine *Nautilus*. Scars on the skin of Sperm Whales from the suckers of giant squid also suggest fearsome battles.



### Captain Cockle's Log

Welcome aboard shipmates! Together, we'll be taking a look at the world's greatest natural resource – the sea!  
Words & pictures by John Joyce  
John Joyce 2004

For more adventures from Captain Cockle, visit his website at  
[www.captaincockle.com](http://www.captaincockle.com)



### Big Softy ... or ....

New evidence suggests that giant squid are too soft and weedy to be real monsters. Instead, they just hang out in the darkness hoping to bump into a meal and that the real villain is ....

### Super-Squid!

The 'Colossal Squid' has a powerful, muscular fin and rotating hooks along its tentacles. While scientists have attached cameras to the bodies of whales, hoping to film giant and colossal squid, no adult has ever been filmed alive!

## Stop Press

Tasmanian squid scientist Steve O'Shea has researched a "Colossal squid" -

*Mesonychoteuthis* - larger, stronger and more heavily armed than the giant squid. First described by scientists in 1925, it was only sixty years later before a complete juvenile specimen was trawled up from the depths. O'Shea thinks that colossal squid can have bodies up to four metres long with tentacles reaching out as far as 15 metres.





By  
Jenna Poole

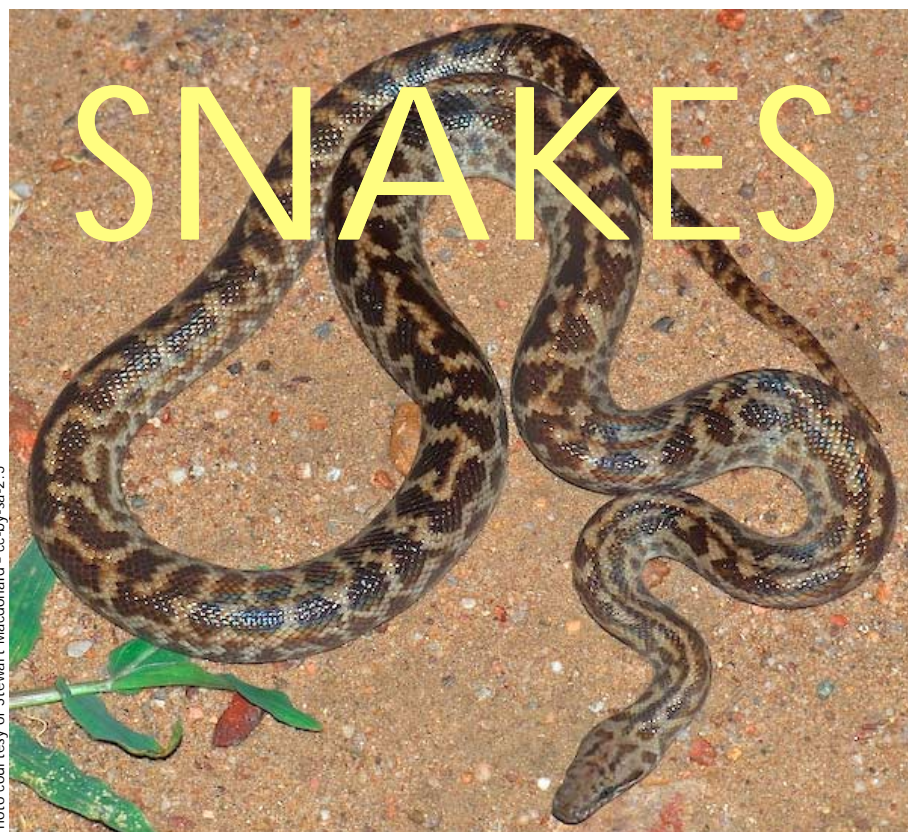
Snakes are limbless reptiles, and they are cold-blooded (or exothermic), which means they cannot make their own body heat as we mammals do. Instead they have to use external energy sources such as the sun. Snakes are also air-breathing (unlike amphibians that can breathe underwater) and they are covered in scales that they can moult (or shed) in one large piece at different stages in their life, having grown new scales underneath.

Around 2,900 species have been identified so far, on every continent except Antarctica. Though there are no snakes in Ireland, three species can be found in Britain (the Adder, Grass Snake and Smooth Snake). Of these the Adder is the only venomous species (meaning it has a bite that can be harmful), however it does not bite people unless it feels threatened and its venom is very mild.

The eyesight of most snakes is not great, however because most of

their body is in contact with the ground they are very sensitive to vibrations and movement. They also use their forked tongues to track their prey by smell, and if you ever see a snake you might notice that its tongue is constantly moving when it is stuck out. Snakes cannot chew their prey so they use either venom or constriction (squeezing until the prey cannot breathe) to kill their food and then swallow them whole. All snakes are carnivorous (meat-eaters).

Photo courtesy of Stewart Macdonald - cc-by-sa-2.5



**Above: The Spotted python (*Antaresia maculosa*).**

## Why are there no snakes in Ireland?

Serpents are often symbols of the devil or pagan religions. Legend has it that when St. Patrick converted people in Ireland to Christianity, he banished snakes from the country and in so doing drove out pagan religions. On the other hand some scientists believe that snakes just did not make it to Ireland in time, before it split off from Britain as a separate island after the last Ice Age.



## Snakey Baby

Most snakes lay eggs, although some do give birth to live young. A snake's egg is leathery rather than hard like a chicken's. Baby snakes have an egg tooth which they use to break through the leathery egg casing but they will lose this egg tooth shortly after hatching. Most eggs are abandoned once they have been laid and the young snakes will have to fend for themselves once they hatch.

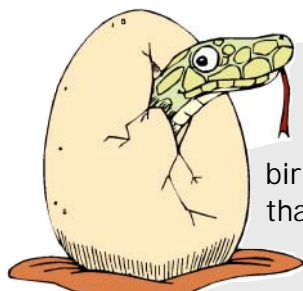




Photo: © Robbie Murphy

Shamrock, also known as Lesser Trefoil  
(*Trifolium dubium*)

# Shamrock

By Jenna Poole

The Shamrock is well-known as one of Ireland's national symbols. However, there is some disagreement between plant experts as to which of today's species Saint Patrick referred. Most Irish people believe that the Lesser Trefoil is the plant in question and this is the species people most commonly wear on 17th March, Saint Patrick's Day.



Around the world, when people see a shamrock they nearly instantly think of Ireland. It has become an image of Ireland, along with the harp and leprechauns! However shamrock doesn't just grow in Ireland and Britain. It can also be found growing as far away as Australia.



Lesser Trefoil is part of the pea and clover family and, like many of its close relations, it has the famous three small leaflets that make up the leaf. Though we recognise the leaf, we may not be as familiar with the flower. Each flower has five, uneven petals, with one much larger than the others. These tiny yellow flowers (no larger than 8mm) are grouped together in clusters of 8-20 to make up the flowerheads that aren't obvious at first glance. The flowers appear from May to August.

## Shamrock & Saint Patrick



Historically the Shamrock is associated with Saint Patrick, though some believe it was also sacred to the Celtic Druids before Saint Patrick and Christianity arrived in Ireland. Both religions used the plant's leaf as a symbol for their faith. The Druids believed the number '3' itself was sacred, and therefore everything that was made up of three parts was as well.

Saint Patrick is said to have used the three leaflets of the one leaf to symbolise the Christian Trinity. One leaflet for God as the Father, one for God as the Son, and one for God as the Holy Spirit. In the legendary words of Saint Patrick "It is both one and three".



# All in a Day's Work

## Jim Wilson - Irish Wild Life Consultant & Film Maker



### PROFILE

For over 30 years Jim Wilson has worked in wild life conservation in Ireland. In recent years he has been filming Irish wild life & promoting our natural heritage through talks, books, newspaper & magazine articles & broadcasting.

### A Day in the Life of Jim Wilson

#### Where do you work?

Wherever there is wild life. When not out filming or talking to school groups I am lucky enough to work from a small office at home, in Cobh, Co. Cork.

#### Have you always been interested in what you do?

Yes, from a very early age I was interested in wild life and taking photographs and started keeping my first wild life notebook, which I still have, when I was 12 years old.

#### What training did you do to get where you are today?

All my training has come from over 30 years studying wild life, reading everything I could find relating to wild life, spending a long time learning how to take photographs and then filming wild life and taking part in surveys and wild life projects both here in Ireland and around the world.

#### What is a day in your life like?

It can vary a lot. I could be trying to film wetland birds from a hide on an estuary or in the garden, in my office on my PC editing what I have filmed or giving wild life talks and working with school groups.

#### What is your main aim?

My main aim is to get people to love, enjoy and protect Ireland's amazing wild life. I try to do this by telling people about Irish wild life, showing them my wild life images, writing books and magazine articles and other work.

#### What is the best thing about your job?

Being close to wild life, trying to capture beautiful images on camera and seeing people get enjoyment from wild life.

#### What is the worst thing about your job?

Seeing how quickly we in Ireland are destroying so much of our wilderness areas.... and having to pay the bills!

#### Do you enjoy your work?

Yes, very much. Everyone should try and get a job they enjoy. I have met too many people who have well paid jobs but hate the work they do.

#### What equipment do you use?

I mainly use two mini-DV video cameras and a powerful lens for getting close images of wild life.

#### Where does your work take you?

I have been very lucky. Last December and January I had a job on a cruise liner in the Antarctic. I spent six weeks showing passengers the wild life and giving lectures on the wild life of Antarctica. I have also spent time filming for the Irish Whale and Dolphin Group during their expedition to the Cape Verde Islands off West Africa, that was amazing. I have a special interest in wetland birds and have travelled to Iceland and other parts of Europe filming Black-tailed Godwits. When I am not travelling abroad I get to spend time in some beautiful places here in Ireland, places just as beautiful as the Antarctica or anywhere else.

#### Do you work alone or as part of a team?

I always work alone when filming but work in small teams when working on other projects.

I have written two books and made an educational DVD with other people and worked very closely with them.

#### What advice would you give someone wanting to do your job?

Work hard. Always be willing to learn. Get to know your subject really well. Don't be afraid to ask

questions even if you think they might sound silly. Study work by the best in the business such as David Attenborough's wild life programmes and see how they film wildlife and how they put their programmes together.

#### What would you do if you weren't doing what you do?

Play guitar in a rock and roll band and wash dishes.

#### What is the best piece of advice you have ever had?

It's never too late to change and Paul Appleby from the BBC telling me a few years ago to buy a Canon XL-1 video camera.

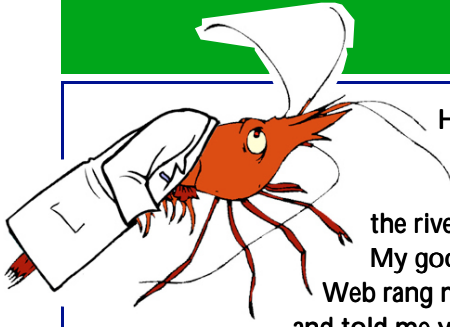


Above: Black Guillemot - midnight, north Iceland.  
Right: Shield Bug - Cobh, Co. Cork.



Photos: © Jim Wilson

# Tommy Time



Hi Kids, I'm Dr. Tommy Prawn, I'm a mad scientist that lives in the river Shannon in Ireland. My good friends at Nature's Web rang me on the watermobile and told me ye had a few questions about science and asked if I could answer them. I told the gang at Nature's Web "no probs, of course I would try to answer the questions you asked." So here I go..... Enjoy!  
Remember, if you have any other science questions, just send them into [editor@naturesweb.ie](mailto:editor@naturesweb.ie) and they'll pass 'em on to me!

Dr. Tommy

## What is the Ozone Layer & What Does it do?

This is a very important question 'cause without the ozone layer we would all soon be very sick. My aunt Gertrude Prawn was sick last Easter and couldn't eat the Easter eggs. She said she was as sick as a small hospital. Of course me being the nice nephew that I am helped her out by eating all of them and she went mad. When she got better, she came looking for me. I was still hiding from her in June.

Ozone is mainly found in two sections of the Earth's atmosphere. Most ozone resides in a layer that begins between 10 and 16 kilometres above the Earth's surface and rises up to about 50 kilometres. This section of the atmosphere is called the stratosphere. The ozone in this section of the atmosphere is known as the ozone layer. Ozone works by absorbing dangerous UV-B light that comes from the sun, due to a series of chemical reactions involving the oxygen molecules. This light can cause damage to our skin and causes diseases such as skin cancer.

That's why we should all be careful when sunbathing on those warm days. My friends mother, Vera Otter is always out sun bathing without putting on lotion. Now she is so wrinkly she should be called Vera Bulldog.



## What Flowers Smell Bad?

I hate flowers, at least I hate having to buy them. My girlfriend on the other hand loves them. Last Valentines day I had to get her a bouquet of roses. €60 they cost me. I nearly choked they were so expensive and to make it worse, all the other boy prawns were slagging me cause of my big bouquet. They're just jealous because I have a girlfriend. Next year I'm getting her something I can carry in my pocket, like a fork.



Photo *Stapelia gigantea* - courtesy of Canglesea CC-BY-SA-2.5

Phew! Can you believe that smell?!!

The disgusting smelling starfish flower (*Stapelia gigantea*) is flesh-coloured with soft white hairs covering it. It attracts flies and maggots to the cavity. The smelly blossom of *Stapelia asterias* looks and smells like a hairy piece of rotting flesh and if you saw it you wouldn't think of it as a flower, you would probably think it was a long dead starfish.

I don't think flower shops will be selling many of these types of flowers. Apparently, if you discover a new type of flower you can decide what to call it. I wouldn't call it *Stapelia* like those scientists did, I would call them Smell Buckets or Stinky Weeds. Next time you go into the flower shop, ask the lady for a bunch of Smelly Buckets and when she says there are none say, OK I'll have a bunch of Stinky Weeds. She will probably throw you out then.

Dr. Tommy Prawn would like to acknowledge the help of his good friend James Ring. Text: © James Ring



# Nature's Web Wordsearch



## Nature's Web Spring 2008 Wordsearch

Try out this giant wordsearch containing words found in this issue of the newsletter.

r d t e k c x k k d w J m o a c r e  
j h h e i c c c i q i f y q c o a l  
c k i n l o i u e m j s s q i n x a  
M h f n r o q r W f t g a c t g s h  
a b e m o s P i t e i a q j c e t w  
r s a e t c l h r a g c f n r r a n  
s h n n s s e c t g P u g d a e r i  
s f a a o y a r x u n t y l t e f f  
p i n n k t w b o c o u n m n l i p  
g n w l c e h h x s m S m i A r s i  
s l e h y S p r i n g n n w a j h g  
q x e y l f r e t t u b l w o S f l  
r r o z o n e l a y e r n v f d l l  
k c e r w p i h s s z f s y q b o d  
z p c o h i i r t t r c i n k b w d  
x d l m s h k o y v q s k s x d e z  
a r g b c c g d s p u r w e h h r t  
g l p c v k z d e a j o n m s s t a

Antarctica

cheesy white fish

conger eel

fin whale

giant squid

Jim Wilson

Mars

owl butterfly

oystercatcher

ozone layer

rhinoceros

Saint Patrick

shamrock

shipwreck

snake

South Pole

Spring

starfish flower



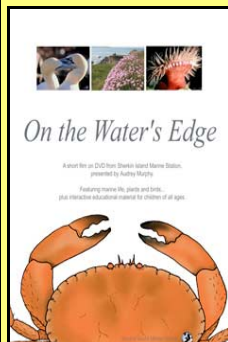
**SOLUTIONS:** Antarctica (15,10,N); cheesy white fish (1,3,SE); conger eel (16,1,S); fin whale (18,8,N); giant squid (1,10,NE); Jim Wilson (12,1,SW); Mars (1,4,S); owl butterfly (15,12,W); oystercatcher (14,1,SW); ozone layer (3,13,E); rhinoceros (1,1,SE); Saint Patrick (16,12,NW); shamrock (9,14,W); snake (2,6,SE); South Pole (12,10,NW); Spring (6,11,E); starfish flower (17,4,S).

# Learn More

## Sea Life DVD!!

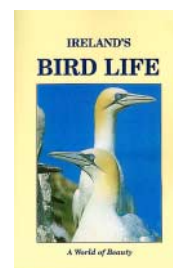
### "On the Water's Edge"

Sherkin Island Marine Station has launched a new dvd called 'On the Water's Edge'. It is made up of a short film on life beside the sea and is presented by Audrey Murphy. It includes 6-10 hours of interactive material for children of all ages. Available from: Sherkin Island Marine Station, Sherkin Island, Co. Cork. €13.30 including postage.



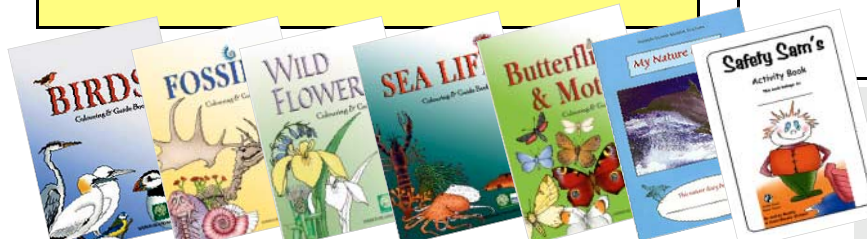
A collection of photographs of Ireland's bird life, featuring over 200 colour photographs taken by one of Europe's finest wildlife photographers, Richard Mills. 160pp

€16.00  
including  
postage



*A Beginner's Guide to Ireland's Seashore* is a pocket-sized guide, suitable for beginners of all ages. This book will help you to explore the wonders of marine life found on the shores around Ireland. 206pp

Only €6.97  
including  
postage

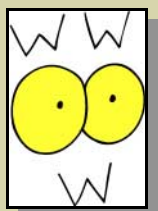


Only €1.75  
each including  
postage or  
€10.50 for all  
seven!  
32pp each

Sherkin Island Marine Station has published a range of colouring books, guides and activity books for children. Each thirty two page *Colouring & Guide Book* gives you the chance to colour, identify and learn about the wildlife around Ireland. *My Nature Diary* and *Safety Sam* activity book will keep you busy for hours.

To order books, send your name and address along with a cheque or postal order made payable to Sherkin Island Marine Station to:

Matt Murphy,  
Sherkin Island Marine Station,  
Sherkin Island,  
Skibbereen, Co. Cork. Ireland.



## Useful Web Addresses

There are lots of websites to be found on the internet that will give you further information on topics we have covered in this newsletter. Here are a few that may be of interest:

Oystercatchers: <http://www.birdwatchireland.ie/Default.aspx?tabid=314>  
<http://www.rspb.org.uk/wildlife/birdguide/name/o/oystercatcher/>

Giant Squid: <http://www.tonmo.com/science/public/giantsquidfacts.php> [www.captaincockle.com](http://www.captaincockle.com)

Snakes: <http://www.thewildclassroom.com/biodiversity/snakes/index.html>

Shamrock & Saint Patrick: [http://www.corkstpatricksfestival.ie/st\\_patrick\\_biog.htm](http://www.corkstpatricksfestival.ie/st_patrick_biog.htm)

Jim Wilson: [www.irishwildlife.net](http://www.irishwildlife.net)

Ozone Layer: [http://www.epa.gov/sunwise/kids/kids\\_ozone.html](http://www.epa.gov/sunwise/kids/kids_ozone.html)

Dublin Zoo Rhinos: <http://zoodublin.blogspot.com/>

'Man' on Mars: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/7205004.stm>

Minerva Owl Butterfly: [http://www.eurekalert.org/pub\\_releases/2007-11/uof-uno112007.php](http://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2007-11/uof-uno112007.php)

Beyond Endurance Expedition: [www.beyondendurance.ie](http://www.beyondendurance.ie)

Sea Life on Shipwrecks: <http://www.iolfree.ie/~edwardbourke/index.html> <http://www.irishwrecksonline.net/>  
<http://www.marlin.ac.uk/>

Antarctica: <http://antarcticjw.blogspot.com/> <http://www.discoveringantarctica.org.uk/>

We cannot be responsible for the content of external websites, so please observe due care when accessing any site on the internet.





# The World Around Us



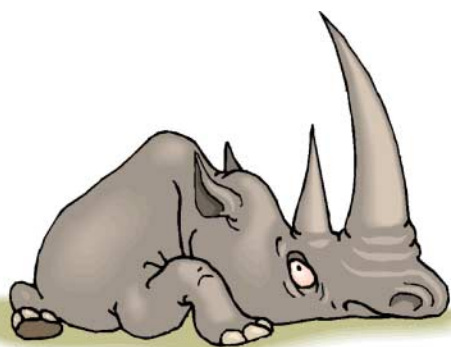
"Foreign Correspondent"  
Michael Ludwig reports on some strange goings on in the natural world.

## Beyond Endurance - Walking to the South Pole

Over the winter, while we were all toasting ourselves by the fire or tucked up in warm beds, four people were slowly making their way across Antarctica, heading for the South Pole. On 8th January 2008, Pat Falvey, Clare O'Leary, Shaun Menzies and Jonathon Bradshaw were the first Irish Team to walk to the South Pole. It was a huge challenge to walk over 1100km pulling a 150 kg sledge with temperatures dipping to  $-28^{\circ}$  C along the way. A record was also achieved by Clare O'Leary who became the first Irish woman to have reached the South Pole. Her constant companion on her journey, Frederick T. Bear (Freddy for short) was the first Irish bear to complete the journey!



Photo courtesy www.patfalvey.com



## All that Glitters is Not Gold!

Dublin Zoo are trying to breed two female rhinos - Ashanti and Zanta. To do this they need to keep a check on their hormone levels and the easiest way is to monitor their faecal samples (in other words their poo!). But how can they tell who's poo is who's when both rhinos are kept together? The keepers came up with a sparkling idea. They added different coloured glitter to each rhino's feed - silver in one and blue in the other - and now it's easy to tell the poos apart. Keepers are delighted with the results and are hopeful that one of the rhinos might be expecting a baby!

## 'Man' on Mars?

Recently sightings on Mars have caused a bit of a stir. A blurry photograph from NASA's Mars Rover, *Spirit*, which has been sending back images of the planet's surface for the last four years, shows the shape of a human figure! However, a scientist from NASA has confirmed that it is just a 2-inch high piece of rock which has been shaped by the wind!

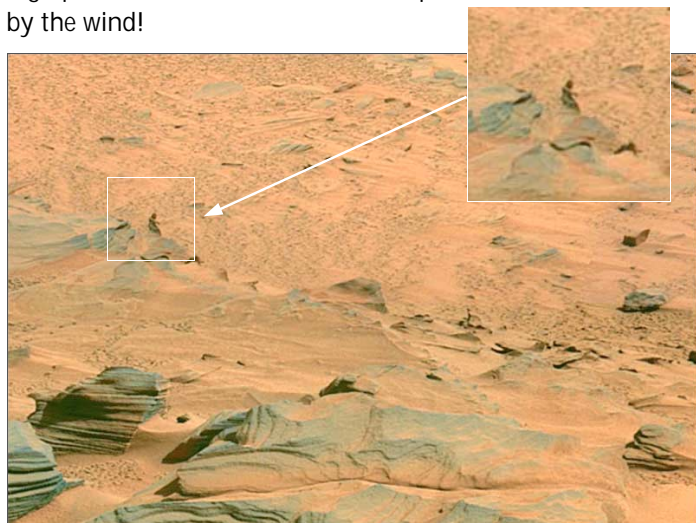
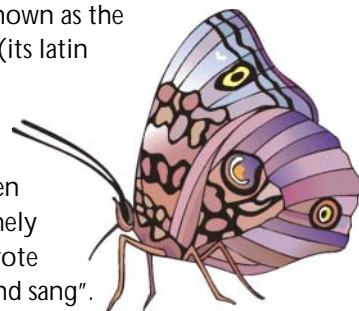


Photo courtesy of NASA

## Granny's Mexican Owl Butterfly

If Margery Minerva Blythe Kitzmiller of Ohio, USA, was alive today, she would have been very proud of her five grandchildren. Between them they paid US\$40,800 to have a butterfly named after her. The University of Florida discovered that a mis-identified owl butterfly in their collection was actually a new species. In order to raise money to continue their research into these Mexican butterflies, they had an online auction for the naming rights. The butterfly is now known as the Minerva owl butterfly (its latin name is *Opsiphanes blythekitzmillerae*) in memory of a woman whom her grandchildren described as "an extremely creative person who wrote poetry, played piano and sang".



# DANGEROUS SNAKES

Of the 2,900 snakes known to man, only 600 are known to be venomous; and within these only a few have venom strong enough to harm anything as large as a human. Many snakebites go unreported, especially in developing countries but it is believed that as many as 2.5 million bites occur every year, with roughly 125,000 actually being fatal (resulting in death). Other snakes are constrictors, and tend to be larger, using their strength to slowly strangle their prey. However, no evidence has been found of a human fatality of this nature! Here are some of the more dangerous snakes. Learn a little more about snakes in general on page 5.



Photo courtesy of L. Shyamal Wynaad

CC-BY-SA-2.5

## Indian Python

As the name suggests this species can be found in a number of countries in Asia, and is the largest snake in India. The average length is 4m, with the longest on record at 5.85m. They are slow-moving animals and tend to travel in straight lines. Their prey can be mammal, bird or reptile, and is killed by constriction and then swallowed headfirst. Some prey may be quite large and because they are swallowed whole, may take a while to digest. During this time the snake will limit its movement, even regurgitating (throwing up) the meal if disturbed.

## Anaconda

This large snake is found in the northern part of South America, and is the world's heaviest snake. It can grow to 10m in length and weigh as much as 250kg. It lives in bodies of water such as rivers and pools, mostly in the tropical rainforest. It catches its prey by lurking in the undergrowth at the shallow edges, and surprising animals as they drink. This snake is a constrictor, which means that it winds its body around its prey and squeezes until they can no longer breathe.



Photo courtesy of Dawson CC-BY-SA-2.5

Photo courtesy of Dawson CC-BY-SA-2.5



## Coral Snakes

Over 65 different species of coral snake have been identified all over the world, with many in North and South America. Each has a slight variation of the red, yellow and black coloured banding; and all of these are venomous, with hollow and fixed fangs to inject their prey. Most species are very elusive, spending most of their time on the forest floor amongst the leaf-litter. They are not aggressive, however a bite to a human may be fatal if it happens; with symptoms starting at slurred speech and ending in paralysis (loss of feeling and movement).

## King Cobra

This striking snake is found in Asia and tends to avoid contact with humans as much as possible. It can reach 5m in length and is one of the largest venomous snakes, using one third of its body to stand 1.5m tall when threatened. In this position cobras also expand their ribs to form a narrow hood to make themselves appear larger. This species is specially adapted to hunt other snakes.

Photo by Jeff Servoss US Fish & Wildlife Service



Photo courtesy of Dawson CC-BY-SA-2.5

## Western Diamondback Rattlesnake

This snake is found in the southern parts of North America, and is responsible for a number of fatal human and livestock bites. Its name comes from the section at the very end of its tail, which is made up of as many as 10 loose segments (these are added to with age) and which rattle when it is moved to scare off any approaching threats. These snakes have long-hinged fangs which flip forward for the highly venomous bite, and heat-sensitive "pits" between their eyes and nostrils to detect their warm-blooded prey.

Text by Jenna Poole

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# Fun Page

## How much did you learn?

*The answers to all these questions can be found in the newsletter...see if you can remember!*

- 1 How long was the conger that was caught on a line at Howth, Co. Dublin, a few years ago?
- 2 What type of whale did Robbie Murphy photograph near the Beacon at Baltimore, Co. Cork?
- 3 Name NASA's Mars Rover.
- 4 What unsafe activity did Vera the Otter do on warm days?
- 5 What does the King Cobra snake form with its ribs to make itself appear larger?
- 6 Name the bear that was Clare O'Leary's constant companion on her journey to the South Pole?
- 7 How much did Dr. Tommy Prawn spend on flowers for his girlfriend?
- 8 What colour glitter did Dublin Zoo use to colour the rhinos' feed?
- 9 How many people will the BIM recipe for Cheesy White Fish feed?
- 10 Are snakes cold-blooded or warm-blooded?
- 11 To which family does shamrock belong?
- 12 Which is bigger, the Colossal Squid or the Giant Squid?
- 13 What colour bill does the oystercatcher have?
- 14 It's spring right now in Ireland. What season is it in Antarctica?
- 15 What is Captain Cockle's website address?

Answers: (1) 4.8m (16 feet) long; (2) Fin Whale; (3) Spirit; (4) Sunbathing; (5) A narrow hood; (6) Fredrick T Bear (Freddy); (7) 60 euro; (8) Silver & blue; (9) Four; (10) Cold-blooded; (11) Pea & Clover; (12) Colossal Squid; (13) Orange; (14) Autumn; (15) www.captaincockle.com.

## What am I saying?

Can you think up a caption for this photograph of a pair of lambs?



Photo courtesy of www.pdphoto.org

## Nature Jokes

What do you get if you cross a snake with a pie?  
A pie-thon.



What's brown and sticky?  
A stick.



What do you call a bear with no socks on?  
Bare-foot.



How do you make a poisonous snake cry?  
Take away his rattle.



What does a well-behaved lamb say to his mother?  
Thank ewe.



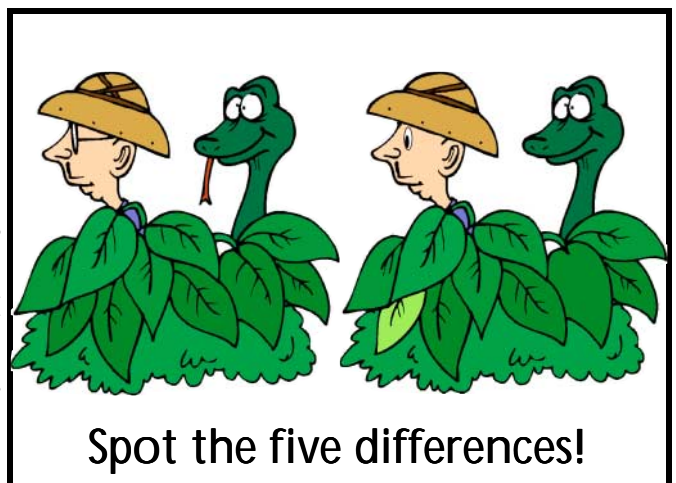
What did the left eye say to the right eye?  
Between me and you something smells.



What do you call a pony with a sore throat?  
A little hoarse.



What gets bigger and bigger the more you take away from it?  
A hole.



Spot the five differences!

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## Sea Life on Wrecks

By Edward Bourke

Shipwrecks mean several things in the natural world. The first that springs to mind is the danger of pollution by fuel oil from the ship's engines or worse still if the cargo itself is oil, such as in a tanker. However shipwrecks can also be of huge benefit to the eco system.



A wreck will be covered in sea life only a year after it sinks.

When a steel ship lands on a firm sandy ocean bottom it becomes a raised feature on an otherwise smooth, though constantly moving seabed. Sand does not form a secure home for most creatures except those that specialise in burrowing down for shelter. A wreck however is a secure anchorage and anything that can grip the surface finds itself living off the bottom where crabs are less likely to attack. The current will be faster away from the sea bottom and the



Shipwrecks provide a home for animals such as scallops and anemones.

Photos: © Edward Bourke



flow of water brings food for creatures that live by filtering plankton from the water. It is not surprising therefore that a wreck will be covered in sea life only a year after it sank. If it is shallow enough for light to reach it, seaweed will grow and attach to the metal. Kelp particularly has strong gripping power and resists the current quite easily. It can be so strong that a scuba diver can pull himself from stalk to stalk against a current.



Anemones grow in large numbers on shipwrecks

Anemones seem to like shipwrecks especially and grow there in large numbers, making shelter for many smaller creatures. The anemones capture small plankton in their frilly tentacles and digest it using digestive juices known as enzymes. It is amazing to see how many of these creatures can cover a wreck until it is hard to tell it apart from a rock until examined more closely.



A Home for Congers

If metal plates fall from the side of the ship to lie flat on the bottom they provide homes for lobsters and conger eels. Here they can hide from bigger fish and can also dart out and grab passing prey from their hidden positions. Conger eels rarely feel the need to come out far and free-swimming congers are rarely seen. A conger can grow extremely long. A conger was caught on a line at Howth, in Co. Dublin, a few years ago. It was 4.8m (16 feet) long and weighed 27kg (60lb). Sometimes you see only the head but you can go several feet along and see the tail through another hole and hardly believe that it is all the same fish. Congers have a fearful reputation among anglers because they have powerful jaws and a severe bite. This only seems to happen when they are out of the water and aggressive. Underwater they are shy and retiring. Congers on a wreck at Rathlin Island, Co. Antrim, are used to being fed bread by divers and have become quite tame.



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# Our Spring, their Autumn

By Jim Wilson

**W**hile spring is well under way for us it's good to remember that when it is spring here in Ireland, in other parts of the world the seasons can be very different. One such place is Antarctica, which is at the other end of the world. Get out a map or globe and find out where it is. You will see that it is much further away from us than England or even America. While here in Ireland all the animals and plants are getting ready for the summer, in Antarctica it is the exact opposite. Everything is getting ready for the long dark Antarctic winter.

I was lucky enough to visit Antarctica during the Antarctic summer – last December and January. When I left Ireland on the 11<sup>th</sup> of December the birds here were busy just trying to survive the short wet cold winter days. They were even coming into gardens to take food that we put out for them. A few days later I had travelled over 15,000 kilometres south and I was



Photos: © Jim Wilson

**Above:** An iceberg at the Antarctic.  
**Right:** Gentoo Penguin chicks.

looking at thousands of penguins in a land of glaciers, huge icebergs and snow everywhere. They were busy with newly hatched chicks making the best use of their short summer. The reason they nest in such a cold place is because there is lots of food in the sea. They nest so far south that it never gets dark during their summer. This means they can hunt for food 24 hours a day!



During the short Antarctic summer they find enough food to make sure their chicks are fully grown and ready to go to sea before their winter starts. This comes to the Antarctic during our summer – confusing? Yes it can be hard to picture how this works. Basically when it is spring is here in Ireland this means that our part of planet earth is beginning to lean towards the sun. The sun shines more and more here, which means our days are getting longer and Ireland is warming up. Because Antarctica is at the other end of the world this means that as days are getting longer here, with more sunlight, the days in the Antarctica are getting shorter with less sunlight. So remember when it is spring here in Ireland it is autumn in Antarctica, at the other end of the world.

Visit Jim Wilson's website:  
[www.irishwildlife.net](http://www.irishwildlife.net)



Photo: © Jim Wilson

**Above:** Emperor Penguin.

## A Dark Time for Emperor Penguins!

During our summer the South Pole will be going through its winter and it will actually be dark all the time for nearly two months! This means that without the sun it gets very cold in Antarctica. It gets so cold even the sea freezes over. This means the penguins have to leave before this happens or they would starve. There is one penguin that will stay in the freezing cold Antarctic winter – The Emperor Penguin. Emperor penguins will soon be laying their

eggs and the males will mind the single egg on top of their feet. They will protect it from the freezing cold by covering it with a big flap of skin, as they huddle together with all the other Emperor Penguins until the Antarctic winter is over. As our spring arrives, it is now time for the Emperor penguins to get ready for the "march of the penguins".

# Nature's Noticeboard!

## Spring 2008

Join An Taisce's  
National Spring Clean  
from 1st-30th April

[www.nationalspringclean.org](http://www.nationalspringclean.org)

Everything needs a  
Spring Clean! Join  
activities in your area  
that help clean up your  
locality.

Switch off the computer  
screen if you leave the  
computer for a short  
length of time. It uses  
less energy than letting  
the screensaver run.

Unplug phone  
chargers and game  
chargers when not  
needed. On stand-by  
they use up to 20% of  
the energy they would  
use when fully on.

Learn the names of two  
birds you didn't know  
before. Put a picture of  
them on the fridge so  
you'll be able to identify  
them the next time you see  
them.

Sprinkle some  
marigold seeds in  
your garden and  
wait for a colourful  
display of flowers  
in the summer.

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