



The World Around Us



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

Back from Extinction in Ireland

There was great excitement in Co. Clare this April. A pair of young White-tailed Eagles were found nesting on a small island on Lough Derg, near Mountshannon. It is the first documented evidence of this species breeding in Ireland since they became extinct here over 100 years ago.



You might ask, how can they be nesting in Ireland if they are extinct? Well, the Golden Eagle Trust began a re-introduction scheme in 2007, with the aim of re-establishing the birds here. As part of the scheme, young White-tailed Eagles have been taken (with permission) from nests in Norway and released in Killarney, Co. Kerry, every summer for the past five years. In total, 100 White-tailed Eagles have been released.

The breeding pair, a four-year-old male and a three-year-old female, settled in the Mountshannon area in early 2011 and in recent weeks began nest building. There is at least one egg in the nest and if everything goes according to plan, it should hatch by the end of May.

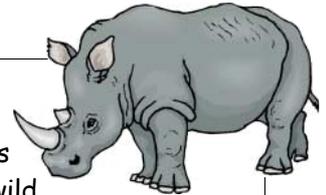
Cuckoo... Cuckoo...!



In May of last year, scientists from the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) satellite-tagged five male cuckoos in Norfolk in the UK.

When the cuckoos left the UK at the end of the summer, the information from the tags showed the birds taking a wide variety of routes across Spain or Italy, over the Mediterranean and across the Sahara desert. All the birds reached Congo and survived over winter. Once they began their migration back to the UK in the spring, they lost one bird in Cameroon and two others are still unaccounted for. Two of the cuckoos returned to the UK in the beginning of May, having completed a 10,000-mile (16,093-km) journey. You can track their journey on www.bto.org/cuckoos. The project is giving scientists lots of information on what research efforts and conservation action could be undertaken for these birds. A recent nationwide bird survey, carried out by BirdWatch Ireland, has shown an alarming drop in the number of cuckoos that visit Ireland.

Removed from Temptation



There is an increasing amount of Rhinoceros horns being poached (illegally taken) from wild animals. Rhinoceros are killed for their horn. The horn is very valuable and illegally sold in a number of countries for use in old-fashioned medical treatments. The value of the horn has prompted thieves to steal rhino horn from museums in various parts of Europe. To protect staff, visitors and for the security of the museums from the thieves, the National Museum of Ireland made the hard decision to remove the exhibits and replace them with replicas. Meanwhile more and more countries with rhinoceros and other species thought to have magical powers are taking bigger steps to stop the poaching. The sad part is that the horn has no medical value!

Standing out in the Crowd!

Killer Whales, or Orcas, are black and white - well usually. However, scientists at the Far East Russia Orca Project recently observed and photographed a 7m all-white male killer whale swimming with his family. Christened "Iceberg", the killer whale may or may not be a true albino (without pigment or colour) - it has a little black behind the dorsal fin. The only way the researchers can be sure is if his eyes are pink and uncoloured. Pink eyes are the genetic "proof" of an albino. Unfortunately, they haven't had a chance to check yet. But, "Iceberg" certainly stands out in a crowd, or his family "pod"!

