



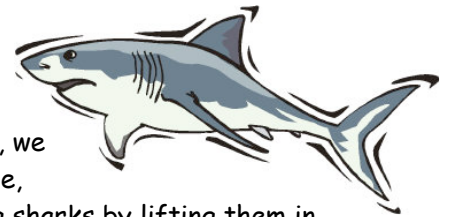
The World Around Us



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

Tracking Sharks in the Ocean

The ocean is a big place (it covers 70% of our earth) and is home to lots of organisms we never see. Thanks to a research project called Ocearch, we now have the chance to follow some of this wildlife, almost in real time. Oearch is carefully capturing sharks by lifting them in specially designed cages so scientists can study them for about 15 minutes before tagging and releasing them. Once tagged, scientists, along with the public, can track their movements with the online Global Shark Tracker, www.oearch.org. There was fierce excitement this March when it appeared that one of the great white sharks, known as Lydia, was heading from Florida all the way to Ireland. Unfortunately, Lydia turned back midway across the Atlantic but it was still fascinating to follow her on her journey. Visit the website to see tagged other sharks roaming the ocean.



A Train Ride with a Difference

In mid-March this year, a tawny owl took a 300-mile (483 km) journey from Glasgow, Scotland to Crick in Northamptonshire, the UK. It was perched on the engine of a freight train. Having stopped to rest on the train, the owl was confused or too tired to fly away when the train began to move. It clung just below the driver's cabin until the train pulled into the freight terminal in Crick. Believed to be about two or three years old, it suffered only a sprained wing. It was brought to the Nuneaton and Warwickshire Wildlife Sanctuary where it was nursed back to health and returned to the wild in early April to deliver Ron Weasley's mail.



Khumba the Zonkey

What do you get when you cross a zebra with a donkey? Well, it appears you get a zonkey! On 21st April, in a Mexican zoo, a zonkey they named "Khumba" was born. Khumba's mother is a zebra and its father is a dwarf albino donkey that lives on a nearby farm. It is rare for zebras and donkeys to produce offspring as their chromosomes (part of an organism's genes that control what you are) are usually not compatible.

Ladybird Survey

The Irish Wildlife Trust (IWT), together with Biology.ie and National Museums Northern Ireland are running a survey to list the number and species of ladybird throughout the whole of Ireland. Very little research or species mapping has been taken of Ireland's ladybirds and it is therefore important to start mapping their location. This year they would like to change this lack of knowledge by asking members of the community, schools, naturalists and everyone who sees a ladybird to submit their sightings through www.biology.ie. You can download an aid from the website to help you with identification.



Recording the April Showers

Recording the amount of rain that falls gives us a better understanding of our weather. Unfortunately less and less data is being collected as it is becoming very expensive to maintain the scientific equipment that records rainfall. Scientists are looking for inventive ways of collecting this type of useful information and Rolf Hut, a scientist from Delft University of Technology in The Netherlands, thinks he may have the answer. He has invented a prototype umbrella, which has a built-in sensor to detect the vibrations of raindrops on the canvas. This information can then be sent to a phone via bluetooth and uploaded to a computer, which could interpret how much rain fell. While this type of data would not be as valuable as that from a proper rain gauge, it could be used alongside other methods of recording rainfall to help our understanding of the weather.

