



The World Around Us



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

Blue Whales in Irish Waters!

Blue whales are the biggest animals in the world, measuring over 30m in length. They were hunted to near extinction in the first half of the 20th century, but in 1966 the hunting of blue whales was banned, giving them worldwide protection. Though they can be found in all the oceans of the world, sightings are rare because of their low numbers and their preference for deeper waters. In September this year, Alan O'Kelly, a member of the Irish Whale and Dolphin Group, was lucky enough to photograph a blue whale off the southwest Irish coast, beyond the Blasket Islands. Days later there were similar sightings from two separate research vessels, one by Dave Wall of the IWDG, and the other by scientists from Bord Iascaigh Mhara - Peter Tyndall and Ronan Cosgrove. Scientists in Canada, who hold a database of whale photographs, have confirmed that the blue whale Alan O'Kelly photographed is a new record for the North Atlantic.



Pygmy Hippo Birth

At Taronga Zoo in Sydney, they have welcomed the birth of a baby pygmy hippopotamus - the first at the zoo in 23 years. Pygmy hippos are highly endangered animals, with only about 3,000 left in the wild. When fully grown, they are a fifth of the size of their cousin, the Common Hippopotamus. Zookeepers have called her "Monifa".

Dispose of Waste CAREFULLY!

Here in Ireland we can now recycle our waste electric and electronic equipment (known as WEEE). These are goods which either have a plug or a battery. However, in space astronauts might think they can get rid of this type of equipment the old fashioned way, by throwing it away. Not so! Last year an astronaut threw a tank of ammonia (used for cooling) off the International Space Station, as there was no room to bring it back to Earth. Believing there would be little chance of it hitting Earth, NASA were keen to reassure people.

However, at the beginning of November the tank crashed into the Tasman Sea, between Australia and New Zealand!



A Patient with a Difference

Recently, a surgeon in the UK found himself helping a vet operate on an unusual patient - a 22 year-old gorilla, who lives at Howlett's wildlife park in Kent, UK. The gorilla was suffering from an illness that was causing him to lose lots of weight. Known as hyperparathyroidism, the illness is caused by glands in the neck producing too much of a certain hormone. The gorilla needed surgery to remove some of these glands and, though the operation is relatively common in humans, it had never been performed on a gorilla.

The operation was carried out by Jane Hoppe, a vet, who was advised by Richard Collins, a "human specialist". Though it was a little strange, the surgeon treated the operation like a regular one. He found the gorilla was slightly different to operate on than a human, having an air sack to help blast out calls in the jungle.

After an hour-long operation, the gorilla is now on the road to recovery and has been reunited with her family.

