



The World Around Us



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

Bird's-eye View

Scientists have been carrying out research on the RSPB Grassholm Island, off the Welsh coast, for the last eight years. The uninhabited island has the fourth largest Northern Gannet colony in the world with just under 40,000 pairs of birds. Dr. Steve Votier of the University of Exeter in the UK, together with his team, have been using the Global Positioning System (GPS) for a number of years to help them build up a picture of the gannets' activities. Tiny units attached to the birds collect and record their movements when out at sea. Then Mark Bolton from RSPB came up with an idea of also attaching a video camera to some birds. While the GPS gave the position of the birds, the camera now allows the tracking team to see whether the birds are flying, feeding or resting on the surface of the water.



University of Exeter



Through Different Eyes

You already know a certain reindeer who has a very red and shiny nose (and some would even say it glows!) but scientists have discovered that there is another reindeer organ that makes a surprising colour transformation. The Arctic Reindeer changes its eye colour from gold in the summer to deep blue in the winter. In summer, the gold colour reflects the bright sunlight but in winter the deep blue makes the eyes more sensitive to the night conditions, helping the reindeer see predators and find food. Built in sunglasses!

Gold Leaf Eucalyptus Tree

Gold leaf is a term used for paper-thin sheets of gold used for such things as decorating mirrors and frames. But what if leaves themselves were made of gold? Well, scientists in Australia have actually found real gold in the leaves of some eucalyptus trees. They believe this gold shows that there is gold underneath the surface of the ground and hope to use this type of information in the future to locate suitable places to mine for gold. But how does the gold get into the leaves? Trees act like hydraulic (water) pumps, bringing water up from the soil to the leaves. Particles of gold in the water are carried from the surrounding rock, pumped up into the tree and then deposited in the leaves. Proving that money does grow on trees!



Finding Rock of a Special Kind

Remember the meteorite that roared across the Russian sky and plunged into an ice-covered Russian lake last February? Well, divers have pulled four or five pieces of it from the lake. The largest bit is 1.5m in length. The crust of melted rock on its surface confirms that these pieces are from the meteorite and not just any old rock. The crust formed as the fireball was racing through the Earth's atmosphere. Pieces are actually for sale on the internet but watch out, not all the pieces are real!



Super Typhoon Haiyan

Super Typhoon Haiyan struck the Philippines in the west Pacific Ocean on 8th November 2013. It was one of the largest and strongest storms ever recorded. The typhoon had estimated sustained peak wind speeds of 315 kph (192 mph), a storm surge (raised sea levels) and heavy rain. It caused massive destruction and loss of life. The area hardest hit by the typhoon was the island of Leyte, where the surge reached 5.2m in height. Is this an example of global climate change?



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