



# The World Around Us



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



Image courtesy of NOAA/CIRA

## A Rare Arctic Visitor in Co. Cork

In early August, birdwatcher and wildlife enthusiast, Paul Connaughton, spotted a very pale looking seal resting on a river bank in Timoleague, Co. Cork. Struck by its paleness he grabbed his binoculars and camera to get a better look. He recognised it as a Bearded Seal, a species that normally lives in Arctic waters. It was only the second sighting in Ireland of this species of seal and as it is not a migratory animal, its presence here was very unusual. Thankfully it looked in very good health and had no difficulty getting back into the water and swimming off. Perhaps the seal had heard about the "Wild Atlantic Way" and was checking it out!



Bearded Seal

Image courtesy of NOAA

## Wild Winds in the Atlantic

The recent hurricanes that battered the Caribbean and the south east coast of the US have caused great hardship throughout the region. Hurricane Harvey hit Texas in late August as a Category 4 hurricane (winds of 58 to 70 metres per sec). As its damaging winds decreased, it dropped 40-65 inches (101-165 cm) of rain in southeast Texas and southwest Louisiana, causing catastrophic flooding. It was the largest amount of rain ever dropped by a tropical storm or hurricane in the US.

In early September, Hurricane Irma caused severe damage throughout the Caribbean and in the state of Florida. It spent three days as a Category 5 hurricane (winds of > 70 metres per second) and was the second strongest ever recorded in the open Atlantic Ocean. It first hit the island of Barbuda in the Caribbean as a Category 5 and ploughed on through other Islands of the Caribbean, including the Leeward Islands and Cuba, causing catastrophic damage along its path. It then changed course and continued on its destructive journey through the state of Florida.

Several islands in the Caribbean got a second pounding within the same week when Hurricane Maria arrived with wind speeds like Harvey. Though not as big as Harvey or Irma, it wreaked havoc in Puerto Rico and the centre of the hurricane ripped through the island.

## From icebergs....

In July, a huge iceberg (A68), twice the size of Luxembourg (5,800 sq km), broke off the Larsen C Ice Shelf in Antarctica. Scientists have been waiting months for this iceberg to "calve", having watched a crack grow in the ice over the last few years. A68, can now move freely into the Southern Ocean. It could remain as a large iceberg but scientists believe it is more likely to melt. This should not affect sea levels because the ice shelf where it calved is already floating as an extension of land-based glaciers. However, the calving off of the ice may lead to further destabilization of the Ice Shelf itself and how glaciers are formed. These events could lead to a slight change in sea levels.



## .... to fatbergs!

A giant 'fatberg', weighing 142 tonnes was recently discovered in an east London sewer. Unlike icebergs, this berg is made up of fat, oil, grease, nappies, baby wipes and other sanitary materials that have been poured down sinks and flushed down toilets. When all mixed together, they compressed into a solid, concrete-like mass, weighing as much as 11 double decker buses. It had to be removed bit by bit using power-hoses—not an easy job in such a confined space—and will be converted into biodiesel. It should make us all think about what we throw down the drain!



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