



The World Around Us



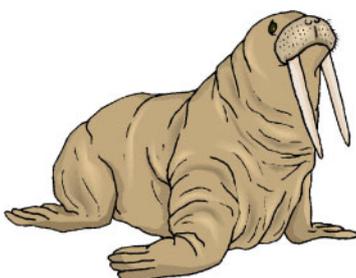
“Foreign Correspondent”
Michael Ludwig reports on
some interesting goings on
in the natural world.

A Surprise Visitor to Valentia Island

On Sunday, 14th March 2021, Alan Houlihan and his daughter, Muireann, were out walking on Valentia Island, Co Kerry when, to their surprise, they spotted an Arctic walrus washed up on the rocks. They realised pretty much straight away that it was a walrus, with Alan telling RTÉ Radio One’s Morning Ireland that it was the size of a cow or a bull in the water.

A local marine biologist could see that it was very tired and thin. It is believed the walrus may have come from its natural habitat of Greenland, along the Gulf Stream, over to Ireland.

The walrus was seen the following week on rocks off the coast of Wales.



Mars and “Perseverance”



NASA launched the Mars 2020 *Perseverance* rover from Earth on 30th July 2020 and after a six month voyage through space it landed on Mars on 18th February 2021.

Having successfully travelled through the Martian atmosphere, it safely land in the Jezero Crater. NASA chose Jezero Crater as the landing site as scientists believe the area was once flooded with water and was home to an ancient river delta—a delta is an low flat area that forms at the mouth of a river. It is hoped *Perseverance* will explore the area for signs of fossilised microbial life, for at least a year.

You can keep up-to-date with the mission at:
<https://mars.nasa.gov/mars2020/>



Left: The remains of an ancient delta in Mars' Jezero Crater. Right: This image was taken by the "left eye" of Mastcam-Z, the rover's zoomable pair of cameras. The left and right cameras are next to each other and point in the same direction, providing a stereo view similar to what human eyes would see.



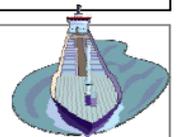
Wisdom with a chick in 2011.
Image courtesy of: John Klavitter/U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service
http://gallery.usgs.gov/tags/NR2011_03_08

“Wisdom” still having chicks at 70!

In 2013, it was reported that a Laysan Albatross known as “Wisdom”, then aged 63, was the world’s oldest recorded wild bird. She was also still hatching chicks on Midway, a remote island northeast of Hawaii, where over a million albatross return to nest each year.

It has recently been reported that “Wisdom” is still alive and hatched another chick at 70 years of age in February 2021.

In 1956, “Wisdom” was given an identification band, which has been replaced a number of times since then. This has enabled scientists to keep track of “Wisdom” over all these years.



A traffic jam like no other

The Suez Canal is one of the world's busiest trade routes. It is a manmade canal linking the Mediterranean to the Red Sea. It was opened to navigation in 1869 and in 2015 it was expanded so larger ships could travel through the canal. In March 2021, a sandstorm and strong winds caused a large cargo ship, the “MV Ever Given”, to veer diagonally across the canal, blocking it to all traffic for nearly a week. The blockage of this important trade route, held up about €7.6 billion worth of global trade per day!

Volcanic Eruptions

There is always a volcano active somewhere in the world. The tectonic plates that make up the Earth’s crust are constantly moving, producing seismic activity where these plates meet.

Iceland is known for its earthquakes and volcanic activity. On 19th March 2021, it saw more activity when there was an eruption at Geldingardalur valley in Reykjanes peninsula, southwest of the capital Reykjavík. It is the first volcanic eruption in 800 years on the Reykjanes peninsula.

Another area of regular activity is the Hawaiian Islands in the Pacific Ocean. On the island of Hawai’i, eruptions continue on the summit of Kīlauea and the giant Mauna Loa, which last erupted in 1984, is gradually waking.

Mount Etna, on the island is Sicily, Italy, is one of the world’s most active volcanoes. It has been largely quiet for the last two years but began spewing lava in mid February 2021.



Image courtesy of: Icelandid Meteorology Office

Lava flow at Geldingardalur valley in Reykjanes peninsula, Iceland.