



The World Around Us



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

A Ladybird with Bad Character?

In the UK, the Harlequin Ladybird has been declared the fastest invading species ever observed. Ten 10 years after it arrived, it is found in nearly every corner of the country. This eastern Asia species is cannibalistic, feeding on the UK's native ladybird species. It is believed responsible for the major decline of at least seven of those native Ladybird species.



Harlequin Ladybird

Image courtesy of 'spacebirdy' / CC-BY-SA-3.0 / commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Harmonia_axyridis_-_botanischer_Garten_Sch%C3%B6nbrunn.jpg

Ireland's National Biodiversity Data Centre reported Harlequin Ladybirds at two sites in Ireland in November 2010. The Irish Wildlife Trust also report sightings at <http://www.biology.ie/mapv.php?m=ladybirds2>. The species can be yellow to orange to red and have 0 to 20 dots. It is larger and more dome shaped than native species and has a distinctive "M" or "W" on the back of its head. For more information, check out this link: <http://invasives.biodiversityireland.ie/speciesalert-harlequin/>.

An Explosion of Goldfish!

A ranger recently made an unusual discovery in Teller Lake in Boulder, Colorado, USA - a huge number of goldfish! It is thought that a handful of pet shop goldfish were dumped in the lake about three years ago and they reproduced and have created a population of thousands. One estimate was more than 4,000.



Goldfish are not native to North America and there are fears that the goldfish might make their way down river interfering with the natural balance of the lake and river by out competing native species. While biologists looked for a solution to the problem, a natural one presented itself. Biologists observed pelicans flying over the lake, scooping up the goldfish and removing the majority of them - a great feed for the pelicans and one less headache for the biologists!

Cry of the Curlew

BirdWatch Ireland have put out a call, asking for help in finding all the remaining breeding pairs of Curlews. They describe the Curlew as once having been a very common bird across Ireland but that in the last 30 years it has declined by over 90%. It is believed that there are probably only a few hundred breeding pairs left in Ireland. The small remaining breeding population is now restricted to western and northern counties, nesting in marginal grassland and boggy areas. For information check: <http://www.birdwatchireland.ie/Ourwork/CryoftheCurlewAppeal/tabid/1106/Default.aspx>



Curlew

Image © Robbie Murphy

Walrus Webcams

Each year, on small protected islands off the coast of Alaska, thousands of Pacific walrus haul out onto exposed rocky beaches. The Walrus Islands State Game Sanctuary in Bristol Bay, Alaska, was established in 1960 to protect one of the largest terrestrial haul-out sites in North America for Pacific walrus. As the ice melts in the spring the male walrus feed in surrounding waters and haul out for a few days in between feeds. The best known of these protected islands is Round Island, where upto 14,000 walrus have been counted in one day. After a ten-year break, the island once again has a webcam positioned on the island giving everyone the chance to view this amazing spectacle: <http://explore.org/live-cams/player/walrus-cam-round-island>



A walrus haul-out.

Credits: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service