



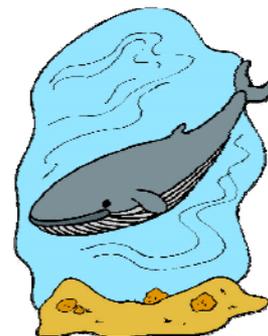
The World Around Us



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

A Deep Sea Feast

When a whale dies and sinks in the deep sea, the whale carcass, or whale fall, provides a sudden, concentrated food source for organisms. During a 2019 expedition, researchers discovered a whale fall 3238 m below the surface near Davidson Seamount in Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary—a marine protected area off the coast of central California. They were live-streaming at the time and captured stunning footage of a wide variety of creatures feasting on the whale carcass. This footage shows an important aspect of a whale’s lifecycle.



Different stages in the decomposition of a whale carcass support different marine biological communities. Scavengers, such as sharks and hagfish, can feed on its soft flesh for up to two years. Then worms, crustaceans and molluscs can feed on leftover blubber and burrow into the rich sediment underneath the whale carcass for a couple of years. In its final stage, organic compounds inside the whale’s skeleton begin to breakdown, encouraging bacteria to grow. This in turn provides support for colonies of worms, sponges and other organisms – all adding to the ocean’s food chain.

CoolClon!

The town of Clonakilty in West Cork has been recognised as a “cool community” by the Cool Planet Group, an Irish foundation promoting meaningful climate actions.

Supported by Clonakilty Chamber of Commerce, the town has introduced a number of successful initiatives, to help the environment. It has installed 10 charge points for electric vehicles, provided 3 water points where people can refill their water bottles and has introduced a “keep cup” for coffee and tea drinkers. There are many other initiatives being undertaken by the town—it even has its very own “minimal waste shop”, dedicated to minimizing the use of plastics and wasteful packaging. The one initiative that will have the biggest effect on the environment is the number of businesses who have committed to updating their refrigeration systems to more efficient ones. This will greatly reduce the carbon emissions from these system.



Salty Mars

An international team of scientists including Marion Nachon, at Texas A&M University, recently reported in *Nature Geoscience* that Mars once had salt lakes that were similar to those on Earth and has gone through wet and dry periods. The team examined Mars' geological terrains from Gale Crater, an immense 95-mile-wide rocky basin that is being explored with the NASA *Curiosity* rover since 2012 as part of the MSL (Mars Science Laboratory) mission. The results show that the lake that was present in Gale Crater over 3 billion years ago underwent drying episodes likely linked to the global drying of Mars. Nachon says that Mars probably became dryer over time, and the planet lost its planetary magnetic field, which left the atmosphere exposed to being stripped by solar wind and radiation over millions of years. The salt ponds on Mars are believed to be similar to some found on Earth, especially those in a region called the Altiplano, which is near the Bolivia-Peru border.

Wildlife learning

A math teacher visiting the Arkansas State University's library captured a photo of an unusual visitor browsing the bookshelves -- a wet raccoon. Codie Clark was at the Ellis Library to give a maths lesson when he spotted the raccoon on the third floor of the building. Clark's photo shows the wet raccoon standing between shelves full of books.



The school's associate vice chancellor, Bill Smith, said there were actually multiple raccoons, and they had been spotted inside the library before. "It's my understanding that there were probably two or three raccoons. Our facility management folks were alerted by the library staff and they came out last night and humanely trapped them," He said the raccoons, which were released well away from campus, likely ventured inside to escape the rain. "In this case, they weren't just looking for higher ground, they were looking for some higher learning as well," Smith said.

