

Penzance B.S.A.C. Conservation Officer's Report September 2010

In a fascinating example of vocal mimicry, researchers from the Wildlife Conservation Society have documented a wild cat species imitating the calls of its intended victim, a small squirrel-sized monkey, known as a Pied Tamarin. This extraordinary behaviour was recorded in the Amazonian Rain Forest and confirmed what until now had been only anecdotal reports from Amazonian inhabitants of wild cat species—including jaguars and pumas—actually mimicking primates, agoutis, and other species in order to draw them within striking range. The researchers recorded the incident when a group of 8 Tamarins were feeding in a ficus tree. A Margay was then observed emitting calls similar to those made by Tamarin babies from a tangle of vines called lianas. Despite the “sentinel” monkey vocalizing to warn the rest of the group, 4 of the monkeys chose to investigate these familiar vocalizations rather than flee, and the Margay suddenly appeared going down the trunk of the tree in a squirrel-like fashion heading for the monkeys. Realising the ruse, the sentinel screamed an alarm which sent the other tamarins fleeing. While this specific instance of mimicry was unsuccessful, researchers were amazed at the ingenuity of the hunting strategy.



Underwater Glider may change the way scientists track fish. Tracking fish across vast continental shelves can present a challenge to anyone studying the seas, but researchers at the University of Alaska have successfully tested a possible solution in the form of underwater gliders. The autonomous underwater vehicles, called gliders, are used for tracking tagged fish. The acoustic tags are usually implanted in fish and the gliders are fitted with acoustic listening devices to hear the signals from the tags. Each glider is about 5 ft long and flies like an aeroplane through the water in an up-and-down motion.



They are propelled using an internal bladder that works much like a fish's swim bladder. When the bladder expands, the glider moves toward the surface. When it contracts it moves toward the seafloor, and they convert the changes in water depth, and pressure, into forward movement. The gliders move at a speed of about one mile per hour and can operate for up to three months, and can cover thousands of miles of ocean. At the surface the gliders transmit data, and can tell not only where the fish go, but measure the physical, chemical, and biological environment of the ocean.

A new packing material that grows itself is now appearing in shipped products across the globe. The composite of inedible agricultural waste and mushroom roots is called Mycobond and its manufacture requires just one eighth the energy and one tenth of carbon dioxide of traditional foam packing material. Comparable in effectiveness to foam insulation, it has the added benefit of being flame retardant and unlike most foam substitutes, when no longer useful, it makes great compost in the garden.



There were 37 reported sightings of Basking Sharks during August. They were seen around the coast from St Ives to Porthcurno. The largest number seen together were 27 off The Brisons on the 30th August. 14 sightings of Bottlenose Dolphins were from Newquay on the north coast to St. George's Island, Looe, on the south. The largest pod was of 20 off Porthoustock. 7 other reports of unidentified dolphins were probably also Bottlenose Dolphins, because they were small pods and Bottlenose were seen locally on the same days. 15 sightings of Common Dolphins were from the Brisons to Porthcurno, except for one sighting of 20 off The Manacles on the 2nd August. There was only one report of Risso's Dolphins, 3 off Gwennap Head on the 3rd. Harbour Porpoises were seen 29 times from Botallack to Gwennap Head; largest number seen together was 10 off Gwennap Head on 27th. 5 Minke Whales were seen, all off Gwennap Head as also was a pod of 6 Pilot Whales. 11 sightings of Ocean Sunfish were from Padstow on the north coast to Polruan on the south. 27 reports of Grey Seals were from Newquay around Lands End to Porthgwarra. There were also two reports of Common Seals, both off St George's Island, Looe, Clusters of Buoy Barnacles attached to birds feathers were also seen in quite large numbers floating on the surface in an area a few miles off Newquay on a couple of days