

OUR ENVIRONMENT

Crustacean's Last Toehold: Rusty Drainpipe

A 90-foot piece of iron drain pipe leading to an abandoned bath house in New Mexico is the only home for 2,500 remaining Socorro isopods.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has proposed that this relative of the common sowbug be listed as an endangered species because of the link it may provide in the ecological and evolutionary web.

This half-inch freshwater crustacean, which eats the algae lining the drain pipe, is one of only two freshwater species in a family that is otherwise entirely ocean-dwelling.

Biologists think it may provide the key to understanding how this and other landlocked relic animals evolved from ancient marine isopods that lived in the oceans once covering much of the western U.S.

The Socorro isopod adapted to the warm, fresh water of a spring, where it lived for millions of years until the spring was capped in 1949. After that, the only place left to this small creature was the section of drain pipe.

This, the isopod's last toe hold, now is threatened by periodic drought and flushing of the pipes.

Dogs for Combating Coyotes

Komondors, which are shaggy, heavy dogs first bred in Hungary to keep wolves from preying on sheep, are the subjects of a \$33,000 U.S. Department of Agriculture experiment to see if they can do the same for western sheep ranchers who claim coyotes are killing their sheep. Weighing as much as 120 pounds and costing up to \$500, the dogs may be the sought-after alternative to shooting, trapping, and poisoning the clever coyotes. Komondors have already been found to frighten caged coyotes simply by walking past them. The tests, to examine ease of handling the dogs and their effectiveness in repelling coyotes, will be conducted at Colorado State University in Fort Collins and the U.S. Sheep Experiment Station in Dubois, ID.

Tipsy Birds

Around Perryville, R.I., the small, red berries of the Russian olive bush, overripe and

slightly fermented, have been intoxicating flocks of birds that snack on them. Local farmers and motorists watch in amazement as birds haphazardly swoop down and over the highway, many missing their mark and slamming into trucks and cars. Such dive-bombing antics have strewn dead birds along the roadside, yet police are loath to charge the birds with f.w.i.—“flying while intoxicated.”



Feds Act to Reduce Bird-Aircraft Collisions

The Federal Aviation Administration and the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have stepped up measures to prevent collisions between planes and birds and to further advance airline passenger safety.

Bird strikes, numbering about 1,200 annually, cost an estimated \$20 million each year in damage to military and civilian aircraft. A 4-pound bird striking a plane moving at 500 miles per hour impacts with a force of 80,000 pounds and has been known to shatter a windscreen and badly dent the opposite cabin bulkhead. More often, however, birds are sucked into the jet engines, which can be instantly knocked out.

Bird strikes, or collisions, have also been blamed for the loss of 140 human lives in this country since such record-keeping was started in the 1940s. The most serious accident occurred in 1960 in Boston, where 62 persons died after their airliner flew into a flock of starlings.

Most bird strikes occur during take-off and landings, but the birds are also a threat in the air during the spring and fall migration season when millions of ducks, geese, swans, and other birds migrate in dense formations at altitudes as high as 20,000 feet. Bird populations at airports also swell significantly at these times.

Situated in many cases near water, mud flats, or marshy areas and quite often close to solid waste disposal sites, airports also attract birds because of architectural features that invite roosting, and decorative pools that birds use for bathing and drinking. Other attractions include standing water on runways or adjacent areas, tall grasses, fruit trees, and other vegetation, and the related insect and rodent food supply.

Simple techniques include draining pools, filling the low spots on runways, removing certain trees and shrubbery, and cutting grasses to certain heights. Other techniques include relocation of existing garbage dumps that may be in air traffic corridors, and operating regular motor patrols of the runways to disperse birds. Dispersal methods such as distress calls and explosive noise devices are also used to reduce the risk of bird strikes. All of these deterrents are aimed at denying food, water, and roosting areas to the birds in an effort to make them seek other, safer habitats.

Mastodons as Fox Bait

A Siberian native has probably found the ultimate in well-aged trapping bait. The trapper had exceptionally good luck catching foxes on his trapline using meat he had found frozen out on the tundra. Paleontologists then discovered that the bait was from the leg of a 13,000-year-old mastodon.

The paleontologists also found traces of an ancient settlement near the mastodon site. They estimated the age of the campsite to be about 13,000 years.

Ultrasonic Pest Repellent

Bob Brown, a California guitar player crippled by polio, has invented a device capable of making sound so shrill that it drives rodents wild, kills cockroaches, and sends fleas flying. The frequency of the sound is over a million cycles a second; the human ear can hear up to about 20,000 cycles.

In a recent 12-month period, Brown sold 18,000 of his so-called “rat-repellent boxes.” The government of Venezuela ordered 300 to kill cockroaches in food stores; 1,000 were bought by Spain to eliminate rodents from granaries.



1979. "Crustacean's Last Toehold: Rusty Drainpipe." *Field Museum of Natural History bulletin* 50(2), 22–22.

View This Item Online: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/21020>

Permalink: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/partpdf/376178>

Holding Institution

University Library, University of Illinois Urbana Champaign

Sponsored by

University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

Copyright & Reuse

Copyright Status: In copyright. Digitized with the permission of the Chicago Field Museum.
For information contact dcc@library.uiuc.edu.

Rights Holder: Field Museum of Natural History

This document was created from content at the **Biodiversity Heritage Library**, the world's largest open access digital library for biodiversity literature and archives. Visit BHL at <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org>.