

OUR ENVIRONMENT

Star Burst May Have Wiped out Dinosaurs

A star exploding 65 million years ago may have sounded the death knell for dinosaurs, according to researchers at the University of California. Limestone samples from a thousand-foot-high road cut in Italy indicate that the extinction of the huge reptiles coincides with a twenty-fold increase in the amount of iridium. Iridium is an extremely rare metal on Earth, but is believed to be about three thousand times more common in the rest of the solar system. The high concentrations discovered, therefore, are thought to have come from an outside source such as an exploding star, which would also produce deadly amounts of cosmic radiation. Dinosaurs, with their slow reproductive rate, would have been especially harmed, making room for their more adaptable competitors, the early mammals, to evolve.

Atlantis Revisited?

Underwater photographers from the Soviet Union, reports *Conservation News*, think they may have discovered the lost, mysterious continent of Atlantis described by Plato more than 2,000 years ago. Russian oceanographers, including a scientist specializing in unexplained maritime phenomena, have been interpreting eight underwater photographs taken from a diving bell near the island of Madeira, southwest of Portugal. They have found ruined, flattened remnants of stonewalls or bridges and stairways at the exact spot indicated by Plato in his writings. The scientists believe that a chain of flat-topped mountains now 100-200 meters below the surface are geological evidence that Atlantis may have been more than a myth—that it actually did sink into the sea due to upheavals along the ocean floor.

Salmon Returned to Thames

The first run of salmon into the Thames River for 140 years is the aim of a project currently under way in Britain. Late last month some 50,000 one-year-old salmon were released into the Thames, and fisheries authorities hope that after a sojourn at sea these fish will return to the river as adults to spawn.

The Thames was once famous for its salmon fishing. But the Industrial revolution put an end to that. Now tests on the quality of the river's water indicate that the clean-up campaign of recent years has reduced pollution levels to a point where salmon may once again be able to live, and breed, in the Thames.

Lasers and Computers Used in Bird-Power Line Collision Study

Using a laser beam and a compact computer, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) has begun a project that will attempt to simulate the effects a high-voltage power line might have on birds. Each year, it is estimated, thousands of birds die or are injured when they strike power lines. Until now, wildlife biologists could merely speculate about the magnitude of this problem, but by employing space-age technology new information is close at hand.

A power transmission line located in an area with a diversity of wildlife and across a major migratory route can prove to be a major obstacle. A variety of birds have been injured or killed from striking fixed objects such as power lines. Such occurrences have been documented at several locations and are not merely isolated situations.

"Bird strikes with fixed objects such as power lines are quite common," according to Carl Korschgen, FWS biologist and coordinator for the project.

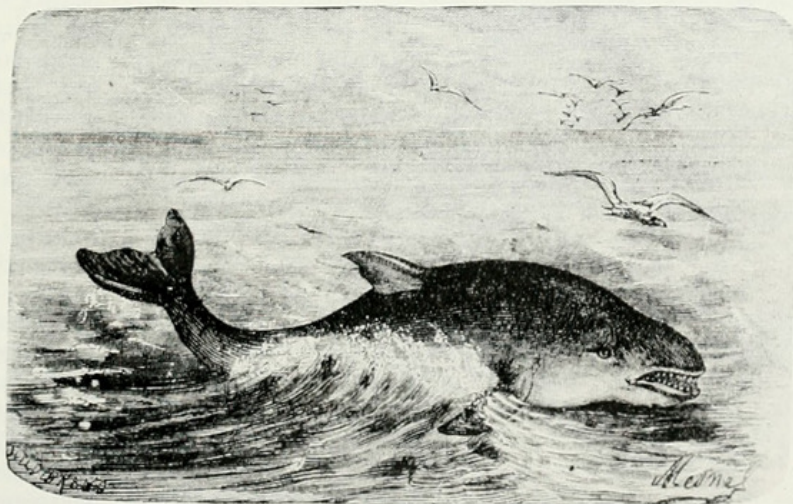
"No bird species seems immune to collision with power lines. Songbirds, eagles, ducks, and geese; all sorts of birds have been known to strike power lines."

Korschgen gave the grisly details about bird strikes: "The effects on birds can be devastating; what we are talking about is decapitation, broken wings, broken necks, and other violent after-effects. These birds are traveling 40 to 70 miles per hour and any contact with a fixed object is going to kill or maim."

The laser beam will project a two-inch diameter beam of light across a 3/4-mile stretch of the Mississippi River where bird movement during migration can be quite heavy. The beam is coupled to a computer that will record the total elapsed time the beam is interrupted when a bird or other object passes. This will provide researchers evidence regarding the size and type of bird passing by. The computer will provide a readout every 10 minutes as well as a total readout since the project began.

The interruption of the laser beam also triggers the shutter of a camera with a 1200 mm lens focused to record on black and white film any object passing through the beam. The unit is quite sensitive and could be triggered by falling leaves and other objects, but the film record will help to clarify this possibility. The laser beam projection is positioned 45 feet above the water surface. The unit is manned part-time, but is capable of remote operation for periods up to seven days. The laser beam poses no known threat to birds as they pass through the beam. It is a low-powered laser system similar to devices used in commercial telecommunications systems.

Invisible to the human eye, the beam will simulate the effects of a power line under the "worst of conditions," such as dense fog, which makes birds highly vulnerable to striking fixed objects. "Weather does play an important part; under certain conditions and migration





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