

**WORLDNEWS**



**UN Appeals for Felix Aid**

The United Nations has appealed for almost \$40 million to help Nicaragua recover from Hurricane Felix.



The category five hurricane hit the coast of north-eastern Nicaragua, destroying homes and killing at least 130 people, many of them indigenous fishermen. Two weeks after the hurricane hit, the situation for around 160,000 of those who survived remains dire. The UN has called on the international community to provide the funds to get emergency aid to the worst affected. Thousands of homes have been destroyed and many villages remain cut off by mudslides. Meanwhile the country's president, Daniel Ortega, reiterated the government's request for help to other international organisations and aid agencies.

**Adventurer Fossett Disappears**



Images from Google Earth are being enrolled in the search for Steve Fossett, the record-setting adventurer who disappeared while on a flight over Nevada. Fossett went missing Sept. 3 after taking off in his single-engine aircraft from a ranch

in Nevada. The trip was supposed to last a maximum of three hours. The search for Fossett or his downed plane covers 44,000 sq km (17,000 square miles) of Nevada's wilderness as well as parts of California. In a bid to help searchers, Google released up-to-date images of Nevada for the search giant's Google Earth software. Following the release of the images, Amazon created a collaborative search scheme run via its Mechanical Turk system, which pays people to perform tasks that computers would struggle to complete, such as translating text or evaluating images. The creators of the search scheme said Fossett's plane would appear as an object about "21 pixels long and 30 pixels in wingspan". Fossett, 63, has racked up about 100 flight world records. In March 2005 he became the first to fly a plane solo, non-stop around the globe.

**Gorillas get Armed Guards**

In Virunga National Park in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, conservationists and gunmen are close to open



war. After the highly publicised massacre of five mountain gorillas this summer, the six surviving gorillas have been given a 24-hour armed guard. The animals were not killed for their meat. Conservationists describe the killings as "executions -- bullets to the head". One theory is the gorillas are victims of a conflict between those locals who see them as the basis for a tourist trade, and others who want them gone so they can use the forests to fuel a booming trade in charcoal. At least eight mountain gorillas have been killed in Virunga Park so far this year. Only about 700 survive, roughly half in the

Virunga mountains and the rest in Uganda.

**North Atlantic Gets Saltier**

The surface waters of the North Atlantic are getting saltier, suggests a new study of records spanning over 50 years. This



might actually be good news for the effects of climate change on global ocean currents in the short-term, say researchers at the US National Oceanographic Data Center. Saltier waters help the global ocean conveyor belt remain stable rather than continue to slow down from the effects of global warming. While researcher Tim Boyer admits it looks like there is currently less danger of the ocean conveyor belt shutting down, this could be short-lived relief only. "Things change rapidly," he said. "Just a few years ago, when we had only seen the increase in freshwater (due to ice melt), there was speculation that it might shut down. Now we've seen that things have stabilised. But in five years things could change again."

**West Nile Virus Breakthrough**



A single genetic mutation might explain why West Nile virus has, within a decade, switched from causing relatively mild infections in humans to outbreaks of deadly encephalitis. The virus, which can pass to humans via mosquitoes that feed on infected birds, didn't pose a serious threat until the mid-1990s, when outbreaks of deadly infection sprang up in Israel, Romania, Russia and eventually North America. Aaron Brault and colleagues at the University of California-Davis, discovered these new strains have in common a gene mutation which increases the deadly effect of the virus. The researchers injected American crows with a weak strain of virus engineered to have the mutation. This boosted the death rate among the crows from 25 per cent to nearly 100 per cent.

**Floods in Nepal**

Much of Nepal's low-lying region of Terai was submerged in August



following intense rains during the south Asian monsoon season. Nepal is blaming its downstream neighbour, India, for the floods, which left millions homeless in India, Bangladesh and Nepal. The Nepalese foreign ministry charges that dams built by India all along the border, often illegally, are preventing rivers draining from Nepal and causing hundreds of the country's villages to disappear under water. The dams are on tributaries of the river Ganges that flow out of the Himalayas. Political tensions have risen as Nepal demanded that India demolish dams. Indian politicians have countered that Nepal should instead build its own dams high in the Himalayan valleys to hold back heavy monsoon flows.

**Condoms Recalled**

South Africa's health department has recalled millions of condoms given out under



a programme it funded. The company that produced the condoms, Zalatex, allegedly bribed a government official to certify almost four million faulty condoms as up to standard. The government is now recalling all 20 million Choice brand condoms produced by the company. About five million people in South Africa are believed to be infected with the HIV virus. Every year, the South African government distributes hundreds of millions of condoms in a bid to control both birth rates and sexually transmitted diseases.

**Tidy Gardens Hurt Hedgehogs**



Tidier gardens and urbanisation have led to a dramatic decline in the number of hedgehogs in the UK, a survey says. Nearly 20,000

people took part in the two-year survey, carried out by the University of London for the People's Trust for Endangered Species and the British Hedgehog Preservation Society. The data gathered by the volunteers allowed the research team to develop a better understanding of the small mammals' nationwide distribution. "Increasing urbanisation and tidier gardens are pushing hedgehogs out from the places where most of us live," said one of the study's leaders. Hedgehogs and house sparrows have been included on an updated list of species and habitats which need protection in the UK.

**Higher IQ for Vegetarians**

Intelligent children are more likely to become vegetarians later in life, a study says. A Southampton University team found those who were vegetarian by 30 had recorded five IQ points more on average at the age of 10. Researchers said it could explain why people with higher IQ were healthier as a vegetarian diet was linked to lower heart disease and obesity rates. The study of 8,179 people was reported in the British Medical Journal. Twenty years after the IQ tests were carried out in 1970, 366 of the participants said they were vegetarian. Men who were vegetarian had an IQ score of 106, compared with 101 for non-vegetarians; while female vegetarians averaged 104, compared with 99 for non-vegetarians.



There was no difference in IQ score between strict vegetarians and those who said they were vegetarian but reported eating fish or chicken. Vegetarians were more likely to be female and to have higher academic or vocational qualifications than non-vegetarians.

**Record Diamond Claim**

A small South African mining company has claimed to have discovered the world's big-



gest-ever diamond. The stone was unearthed at their operation in the north-west province. The giant gem was reportedly about 7,500

carats, which would be twice the size of the Cullinan Diamond, centre-piece of the British crown jewels.

A report in the industry magazine Mining Weekly said the gem has been certified as a diamond. In a photograph emailed to the BBC, the stone appears to be about the size of a coconut, and has a greenish tinge. Ernest Blom, who is also president of the World Federation of Diamond Bourses, said "It can be likened to a second Rembrandt. That is how rare it would be."

**Coral Worse Off Than Believed**

The first large-scale analysis of the world's largest reef system throughout the Indian



and Pacific oceans indicates that coral destruction is faster and more widespread than researchers previously thought. Over the past two decades, coral has disappeared at five times the rate of Earth's rainforests. The Indo-Pacific area is home to 75 per cent of the world's coral reefs. John Bruno, a marine biologist at the University of North Carolina, and colleagues spent three years compiling over 6,000 independent surveys. In all, the data spanned four decades and recorded the status of more than 2,600 reefs. Over 3,000 square kilometers of living coral reef are lost each year, the team found, and the speed of destruction is no lower in protected habitats such as Australia's Great Barrier Reef.

**Aussies want Good Mates**



People who want to become Australians will have to commit to broad values of "mateship" and may need to brush up on horse racing and political history under new citizenship tests outlined by the government. The tests will require immigrants to correctly answer a series of questions about the nation's history and culture, including possible questions about the Melbourne Cup horse race and when Australia became a nation. "It emphasizes that those becoming a citizen in Australia have an overriding commitment to Australia, to our laws, to our values and to our community," said Immigration Minister Kevin Andrews. The new tests, and laws to ensure immigrants must spend four years in Australia instead of three to become citizens, are part of a government push to promote "Australian values" after riots between Muslim and non-Muslim youths at a Sydney beach in 2005.