



Divers Jane Sharpe and Peter Murphy with the sunfish they found in Tralee Bay and (right) Michael O'Keeffe on the look out for the rare Terek Sandpiper bird (above) at Blennerville, Co Kerry. Picture: Eamonn Keogh

## Sunfish and sandpipers, strangers on the shore

Kate Chambre

FROM birds of the air to creatures of the deep, mysterious strangers are being spotted off our coasts.

Four ocean sunfish, accompanied by at least 12 dolphins, surfaced at Horn Head, Dunfanaghy, Co Donegal, close to three English holidaymakers.

Dr Sean Biddulph, his wife Noranne, and their daughter Anna from Hove in East Sussex have dived all over the world.

But they were "extremely surprised" to see sunfish because they are usually found in warmer waters.

"It was unbelievable to see them. Particularly the sunfish: they were just lying there on their side. They are quite unusual looking creatures."

Biologist Ciaran O'Donnell, from the Marine Institute of Ireland, said that the sighting of the dolphins at this time of year wasn't at all unusual but "it's quite strange" to see four sunfish close together off the coast of Ireland.

"Usually you would only see one or two at a time, if at all. So four would be pretty special."

Sunfish can grow to around three metres and weigh 1½ tonnes.

Brian Harding, an expert at the Natural History Museum in Dublin, said: "According to literature, Ireland has never seen ocean sunfish turning up in such large numbers before."

"Sunfish are quite mysterious because they are deep water fish and when they come to the top no one is quite sure what they are doing.

"We do have one on display here at the museum which came from Co Donegal's Lough Swilly. It dates from around 1888," said Mr Harding, who runs the education programmes at the museum.

Meanwhile, a rare migrant bird blown off course is drawing busloads to a seaside village.

The Terek Sandpiper is normally found on the Indian subcontinent or as far south as Australia this time of year, having made its way from its northern nesting ground of Russia and Finland.

Instead, it has travelled westward and landed in Blennerville, near Tralee, best known as the shipyard centre for the Jeanie Johnston replica famine ship.

Hundreds of people, have been arriving in Blennerville since early on Monday to catch a glimpse of the bird on the Canal Road near the shoreline.

According to ornithologist Frank King the sandpiper is one of a number of rare birds to have arrived on the Dingle peninsula in recent weeks because of the hurricanes battering the Americas.

And villagers living near a mink farm claim their homes have been invaded by swarms of flies.

Southern Health Board officers yesterday visited the farm after complaints it might be linked to the mysterious fly infestation.

However, the board said a similar investigation last month found no evidence of a public health nuisance from the farm.

People in Dromkeare, where the mink farm is located, said their houses had been invaded by the swarms in recent weeks.

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