

All the good news about animals, wildlife, and the earth

May/June 2006

Best Friends®

**Meet the
Hoppers!**

**The Great
Bunny Rescue**

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Nature & Us: A Philosopher Speaks
Helping Pits Beat Their Rap
Big Fat Cats!



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For animals, the best is yet to come



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What's up down there?

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Best Friends magazine is published by Best Friends Animal Society. Located at Angel Canyon, in the majestic red-rock country of Utah, Best Friends runs the nation's largest sanctuary for abused and abandoned animals, and is also home to a host of wildlife who find refuge here.

Best Friends operates a low-cost spay/neuter program, sponsors a network of members in rescue, foster care and humane education, and works with humane groups nationwide to bring about a time when there will be No More Homeless Pets.

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Brave New World?

(part deux)

► By Michael Mountain

Our work for the animals is a work of the soul.



“The whole planet is one at-risk population.”

“This is really the first great challenge of the era of globalization.”

What’s Laurie Garrett talking about? Foreign cars? Jobs outsourced to India?

“Coming up with [effective] strategies will mean an unparalleled scale of diplomatic tap dancing, mutual sharing, and transparency and openness.”

The war on terrorism? The Iraqi insurgency?

“Every country in the world could have a massive death toll.”

Nuclear holocaust?

No, bird flu.

Garrett is senior fellow for Global Health at the Council on Foreign Relations. “It’s the new age of globalization,” she explained on C-SPAN. “And we’re looking at the first genuine globalized threat. The whole planet is one at-risk population.”

Bird flu is expected to arrive in the United States just around the time this magazine reaches you. At the same time, in parts of Africa, we may be seeing the start of what many scientists call the “nightmare scenario” – people with HIV picking up the deadly H5N1 avian virus, too.

“It’s something we’ve never seen before,” said Garrett. “When these two viruses come into the same human population, we just don’t know what’s going to happen.”

Of course, it’s quite possible that nothing much will happen, and that the virus will just die out. But it’s equally possible that a whole lot of *us* will die out. The fact is, we have no idea how this whole bird flu scenario is going to unfold.

Welcome, indeed, to the brave new world of globalization.

In an interview in this magazine, philosopher Sam Keen describes birds as “feathery messengers.” In earlier times, people saw birds as carrying messages from nature and the gods. Today, as they migrate around the world, the birds bring us a simple but stern message: Learn to cooperate with each other and with all of nature – or face potential catastrophe.

And birds are not the only creatures sending us urgent messages. Polar bears face extinction in the Arctic as the ice melts faster and faster. Other animals struggle to survive as human populations swell.

In a major speech recently, British Defense Secretary John Reid described one aspect of the situation very bluntly. Climate change, he warned, “will make resources even scarcer, and the emergence of violent conflict more likely.”

A similar report by the Global Business Network warns that global climate change is likely to set off pitched battles among the survivors for access to food, water and other precious resources.

It’s easy to go into overload just trying to contemplate all of this. And there’s little indication that governments and other large institutions are going to be much help. The truth is that governments tend to have one simple primary agenda: self-preservation, whatever the cost.

Maybe such a global threat would shock them all into setting aside their differences and working in the common interest. But that’s unlikely. There’s such a backlog of ill will and mistrust that the give-and-take

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Original Snail Mail?

Scientists have determined that snails living on the isolated Tristan da Cunha islands, midway between Brazil and South Africa, are the same genus as land snails found in Europe. How did the snails cross the ocean? Researchers don't know for sure, but they suspect the tiny travelers may have hitched a ride on a migrating bird.

The snails secrete a particularly sticky mucus that could allow them to stay attached to birds for the 5,600-mile-long flight. And because they're hemaphrodites, they don't need a mate to reproduce. So, if only one snail made it to the islands, it could have been an Adam or an Eve.

Researchers don't think people brought the snails over because the slimy creatures have been on Tristan da Cunha for more than 500 years, long before humans discovered the remote islands.



The Mane Attraction

Tahrs, the Fabio wannabes of the goat world, have long, luxurious chest-length manes. Observers claim that the males with blond manes are the most likely to get lucky with the girls.

A student from the University of Illinois discovered that male tahrs, like all goats, butt heads in mating competition, but the females appear unimpressed. It's the manes, not the horns, that are turning the girls' heads.

Native only to the Himalayas, tahrs are a protected species, but their numbers are dropping for unknown reasons. Researchers are baffled, but only the tahrs' hairdressers know for sure.



Nessie the Elephant?

It's a beastly idea to monster chasers everywhere, but there just might be a mundane explanation for all those mysterious sightings at Loch Ness.

Neil Clark, a paleontologist at Glasgow University's Hunterian Museum, spent two years researching Nessie and concluded that the beast could've been nothing more than a swimming elephant.

Elephants from visiting circuses sometimes rested on the banks of Loch Ness. The trunk and humps in the water would have looked like some of the most famous Nessie photographs.

"When their elephants were allowed to swim in the loch, only the trunk and two humps could be seen – the first hump being the top of the head and the second being the back of the animal," Clark said. "It's quite possible that the people around Loch Ness saw some of these animals." Traveling circuses were once common in the area.

Of course, elephants can't explain the more recent sightings. For those, Clark suggests floating logs or waves. His findings are published in the Open University Geological Society.

The Color of Love

For 100 years, scientists have thought that primates used their color vision primarily to find fruit that are ripe, and therefore ready to eat. But new evidence now shows that some primates can detect a change in skin tones, which can indicate fear or sexual response.

Some primates, like the macaque monkey, are adept at recognizing the subtle changes in skin color that occur on a female's bare bottom when she is ready to mate, or on an enemy's hairless face when fear drains the blood from it.

All primates are free of hair on their faces and bottoms. "There's no sense in being able to see the slight color variations in skin if you can't see the skin," said Mark Changizi, a researcher at Caltech. "This could connect up with why we're the 'naked ape.'" 🐾

