

# Did You Know?



Nuria Ortega

## WHAT'S FOR DINNER?

- ◆ At least 30,000 of the world's plants are edible.
- ◆ We eat some 7,000 of them, but only 150 are commonly consumed.
- ◆ Twenty edible plants make up 90 percent of the world's food, with three grains—wheat, rice, and maize—accounting for 50 percent of the world's food energy intake.

## THE DEEP BLUE SEA

- ◆ The oceans cover more than 70 percent of the Earth and contain 99 percent of the planet's living space. Humans have explored less than 10 percent of that space.
- ◆ Ninety percent of the ocean's volume constitutes the dark, cold environment we call deep ocean water.
- ◆ Average depth of the ocean: 3,795 meters. Average height of the land: 840 meters.
- ◆ An estimated 50-80 percent of all life on Earth is found in the ocean. There are currently more than 170,000 valid marine species, according to the World Register of Marine Species. According to the Census of Marine Life, there could be more than 1 million marine species.
- ◆ Sharks attack some 50-75 people each year worldwide, usually with 8-12 fatalities (IASF); whereas, some 20-100 million sharks are killed every year as a result of fishing activities.



Jane Sunderland

## ARE WE ALONE?

- ◆ Over the past 250 years, scientists have identified and named some 1.78 million species of animals, plants, and microorganisms. Today about 15,000 new species are discovered every year.
- ◆ Earth's total number of species is unknown. Estimates place the number at 5-30 million.

## IT'S THE END OF THE WORLD AS WE KNOW IT

- ◆ One and a half acres of rain forest are lost every second. Deforestation is resulting in the loss of 137 plant, animal, and insect species every day. As the species disappear, so do possible remedies for numerous diseases. To date, about 25 percent of Western drugs are derived from rain forest plant species, yet less than 5 percent of rain forest plants have been studied.
- ◆ The rate of extinction is accelerating. Thirty-eight bird and mammal species became extinct between 1600 and 1810, compared to 112 species between 1810 and 1995 (McDaniel and Gowdy 2000). Of the 129 recorded bird extinctions, 103 have become extinct since 1800 (Birdlife International 2000).



## SIZE MATTERS!

- ◆ The Amazon rain forest covers 566–670 million hectares. If Amazonia were a country, it would be the ninth largest in the world. One hectare may contain over 750 types of trees and 1,500 species of higher plants.
- ◆ Twelve countries—Australia, Brazil, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ecuador, India, Indonesia, Madagascar, Mexico, and Peru—are home to 70 percent of the world's species, many of which are endemic.
- ◆ Earth's largest animal ever (even bigger than the greatest known dinosaurs) is the endangered blue whale. It can measure up to 30 meters long and weigh as much as 180 tons; its heart is the size of a Volkswagen Beetle.
- ◆ At 15.25 meters long, the snakelike oarfish is the longest bony fish in the world. With a dorsal red fin running its length, a horselike face, and blue gills, the oarfish accounts for many sea-serpent sightings.

## FROM THE EQUATOR TO THE POLES, BIODIVERSITY RULES!

- ◆ Ecuador's Yasuni National Park may contain the highest terrestrial biodiversity in the world. For example, one hectare of forest may contain some 100,000 species of insects. And contrary to previous thought, the polar regions can be rich in biodiversity as well. The South Orkney Islands and their surrounding waters have more biodiversity than the Galapagos Islands!



Claudia Sobrevilla

## WATCH WHERE YOU STEP...

- ◆ Forest soils are one of the most diverse ecosystems on Earth. Depending on the forest type, a square meter of soil could contain more than 1,000 invertebrates and countless micro-arthropods. An old-growth forest supports more than 56 times as many insects and bugs belowground as it does aboveground.

## ...AND WHAT YOU DRINK!

- ◆ Billions upon billions of microscopic creatures live in the ocean. A mouthful of seawater may contain tens of thousands of zooplankton, hundreds of thousands of phytoplankton, and millions of bacterial cells.



## LOOKING AT FROGS, LOOKING AT YOU

- ◆ Frogs have amazing eyes. Frogs can see to the front, sideways, and up at the same time and their eyes remain open when they sleep. The eyes even help a frog swallow its food; each blink pushes the eye down, pressing onto the roof of mouth and creating a bulge. This bulge pushes food inside the frog's mouth down the frog's throat.