Fugitive Flamingo “Pink Floyd” Spotted in Texas

March 31, 2022



Photo: Texas Parks and Wildlife

No. 492 is quite the traveler.

The African flamingo escaped from a Kansas zoo in 2005. It's since been spotted in Wisconsin, Louisiana, and Arkansas. And now, a fisherman just captured the flamingo on video on the Texas Gulf Coast.

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department tweeted news of the return of No. 492 – aka “Pink Floyd” – to the Lone Star State, which the bird visits every few years: "Looks like Pink Floyd has returned from the 'dark side of moon!'"

Pink Floyd, identified by the number on its leg band, and a fellow flamingo flew the coop at Kansas’s Sedgwick County Zoo on a stormy night in June 2005. Staff forgot to clip their wings, which would have prevented their escape. The two flamingos, along with 38 others, had been born in Africa, then shipped to the Kansas zoo in 2004. Nobody has reported seeing the other zoo escapee since.

David Foreman, the Texas fisherman, knows the birds rarely appear outside of Florida. Take it from him: He grew up in a bird sanctuary. “My brain was telling me, ‘No way you’re looking at a flamingo,’ but my eyes were telling me, ‘That’s what it is, there’s no mistaking it.”

‘Devastating’ Invasion of Zebra Mussels Marches Westward

September 18, 2025



Photo: Wikipedia Commons

Zebra mussels are an invasive species. They first appeared in the US in the 1980s. They have caused billions of dollars in damage. Up to now, they have only been found in rivers and lakes in the East and Midwest. But they have now been detected in the Colorado River, wildlife officials say. The sightings mark a steady expansion for the clam-like creatures.

Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) first detected zebra mussel larvae in July. They will probably spread quickly, officials say. “Zebra mussels pose an extreme risk … to Colorado,” CPW wrote in its statement. The mussels filter plankton from the water. That robs many native fish and other species of their natural food source, CPW explained.

CPW also noted that female zebra mussels can produce up to 1 million eggs each spawning season. As the mussels grow, they form dense clusters. They attach to rocks, the undersides of boats, and the interior of sewer and water intake pipes. That clogs them up. A 2022 study by the US Forest Service estimated that zebra mussels were responsible for $500 million in damages annually in the Great Lakes region alone.

The spread of zebra mussels, experts note, is entirely human-caused. They are native to Asia. Humans spread them on the hulls of ships. As humans move from waterway to waterway, zebra mussels hitch a ride. That's how they made it to the Colorado River, CPW says.

“This news is devastating,” Tina Bergonzini said in the press release. Bergonzini is a Colorado regional water manager.

Bat-Drones to the Rescue!

November 18, 2025



Photo: courtesy of Unsplash

When disasters strike, every moment can mean the difference between rescue and tragedy. Finding people trapped by floodwaters or beneath the rubble of an earthquake can be difficult even in broad daylight. In the dark of night, it's twice as tricky. That's where robot engineers aim to help.

Engineer Nitin Sanket works at the Worcester Polytechnic Institute in Massachusetts. "We all know that when there's an earthquake or a tsunami the first thing that goes down is power lines. A lot of times, it's at night, and you're not going to wait until the next morning to go and rescue survivors," Sanket told The Associated Press (AP). "So we started looking at nature. Is there a creature in the world which can actually do this?"

The answer to Sanket's question: bats. Sanket's team is working on tiny drones. They are equipped with technology inspired by the flying mammals' echolocation skills. The robots are designed to fly through darkness, storms, and fog. They can even fly underground. Rather than a single drone piloted by a human, the bat-drones work in swarms, Sanket says. They send out pulses of sound. Then they read the waves as they bounce off of debris and other obstacles, not unlike a bat on the hunt for bugs. Sanket's team hopes to use artificial intelligence (AI) to translate various sounds and shapes into data for rescuers. That can pinpoint where a trapped person might be.

"Bats are amazing," Sanket told the AP. "We are nowhere close to what nature has achieved. But the goal is that one day in the future, we will be there and these will be useful for deployment in the wild."

New “Mesmerizing” Rainbow-Colored Fish Stuns Scientific World

March 11, 2022



Photo: Yi-Kai Tea.

A new fish is turning heads in the water world.

The scientific name of the fish is *Cirrhilabrus finifenmaa*. It's a rose-veiled fairy wrasse. The fish is known for its rainbow coloring. Scientists found it off the coast of the Maldives. The creature is beautiful.

The California Academy of Sciences calls it a “multicolored marvel.”

The fish has actually been around for a while. In the 1990s, scientists identified it as a known species by accident. Then, scientists looked at the fish again for a new study. They took a closer look at its scales, size, and color. They realized the fish was a new species.

Not only that, but the scientists who made the discovery included a marine biologist from the Maldives. He co-authored a study on the fish. He is the first scientist from his country to formally describe a new species.

It’s “always been foreign scientists who have described species found in the Maldives,” he said. “This time is different … and getting to be part of something for the first time has been really exciting, especially having the opportunity to work alongside top icthyologists such an elegant and beautiful species.”

The fish is named, in part, for the Maldives’ national flower, the pink rose. “Finifenmaa” means “rose,” in Dhivehi, the language spoken there.

The Heat Is On: Students sent Home as Climate Change Cooks Classrooms

June 8, 2022



Photo: courtesy of Unsplash

One of the reasons school's historically let out for the summer months has to do with heat. It's hard to focus and learn while sweating in a hot classroom. Believe it or not, air conditioning (AC) has only been around in a minority of schools since the 1970s and 1980s.

Even today, many schools don't have AC. So, higher temperatures are wreaking havoc on some affected students. Last week, schools in Philadelphia and Baltimore sent kids home early. They had to take "heat days."

Areas where hot, humid days have never factored into school, are now finding school buildings too hot for students. It's mostly a problem during the start and end of the school year. Urban schools have limited physical space on which to build. They were built to crowd large numbers of children into small spaces. Those areas usually lack shade from trees or other green space.

A study found that about 41% of public-school systems need to modernize or replace the heating, cooling, and ventilation systems in at least half of their schools. They are the most impacted by really hot classrooms. That's according to the journal Nature. Researchers found students did worse on standardized tests when temperatures rose above 80 degrees.

Is Pluto a Planet? Scientists Battle Over the Answer

January 4, 2022

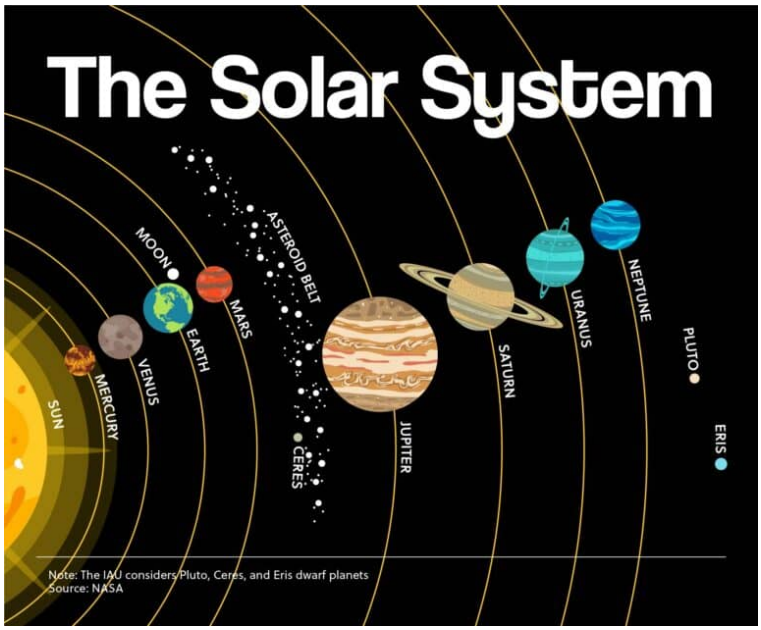


Image: courtesy of Subject To Climate

Pluto has a complicated past. Once it was a planet, but then, it was downgraded. Now, it's a "dwarf planet," and again, at the center of a scientific feud. A team of scientists argues that Pluto should once again be called a planet. They say dozens of other similar objects in the solar system should also be classified planets.

Pluto was discovered in 1930. And it had been classified a planet until 2006. But then the International Astronomical Union (IAU) changed the definition of a planet. It said a planet must be round, orbit the sun, and have the largest gravitational force in its orbit.

Pluto meets two of those conditions: It's round and orbits the sun. But Pluto is surrounded by objects called "plutinos." They share its orbit. That caused the IAU to drop Pluto from the list of planets. So, that leaves our solar system with just eight planets. They are Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, and Neptune.

Now, researchers argue in a new study that the IAU definition is flawed. They say it's based more on astrology than planetary science. The researchers based their conclusion on data from NASA's New Horizons probe. It visited Pluto's orbit in 2015. "We think there's probably over 150 planets in our solar system," the study's lead author said.

Automakers Race to Put Cars on the Moon

February 8, 2022



Photo: from Toyota Motor Corporation

The world's newest space race has shifted into high gear. Car companies have entered the race. They're trying to roll out new vehicles that drive across the moon's surface. Toyota plans to build a moon rover with the help of Japan's space agency, JAXA.

Toyota is developing its "Lunar Cruiser." Experts predict the moon could be colonized by 2040. The automaker wants to help. The joint project has been going on since 2019. Toyota officials released details about the space vehicle last week.

Takao Sato heads the project. He said the cruiser is made to provide moon colonists with a car where they can sleep, work, eat, and talk to others. "We see space as an area for our once-in-a-century transformation," Sato told the Associated Press. "By going to space, we may be able to develop ... technology that will prove valuable to human life."

The Lunar Cruiser is named after the company's earthly land cruiser. It will come with a robotic arm. The car is set to be revealed by the end of 2030, company officials said.

General Motors is developing its self-driving Lunar Terrain Vehicle. Nissan is also creating a moon cruiser with JAXA. The company has not said whether the vehicle will be driven by a person.

Yellow Buses are Going Green for Kids' Health and Environment

March 8, 2022



Photo: Wikipedia Commons

Imagine riding on a school bus with an engine that doesn't roar like an old lion or stink like a diesel spill. Quieter, cleaner transportation is on the way for some kids as school districts roll out electric buses.

Nearly all of the 480,000 traditional yellow school buses in the US run on diesel fuel. They emit more greenhouse gasses than other vehicles. The buses only get six miles per gallon of diesel. The air quality inside and around them is poor.

Not so with electric vehicles. The electric buses are cheaper to maintain, don't pollute like the current buses, and are very quiet. However, the buses cost a lot. They cost at least twice as much as diesels. Schools also need the ability to charge them. That's stopped many school systems from buying them.

That's starting to change. The Biden administration's $1.2 trillion infrasctructure package includes $5 billion for school buses. School districts are facing pressure from parents and activists to address children's health concerns as well as the environment. So, they are coming up with funding on their own to buy more electric buses.

One school board in Maryland voted in 2021 to replace 25 diesel buses with electric ones. It's committed to swapping out its entire fleet through a lease program by 2035. California's legislature has already paid for 1,167 electric buses. 1,000 more will be bought. In Florida, 12-year-old Holly Thorpe lobbied Miami-Dade Public Schools to apply for a state grant to purchase 50 electric buses. The school board got the grant.