Everyday Mysteries: Can it rain frogs, fish and other objects?

By Library of Congress, adapted by Newsela staff on 01.17.17
Word Count **630**
Level **870L**

Water spouts (tornado) hit the Black Sea in the Arhavi district of Turkey's northeastern province of Artvin on June 8, 2016. Photo: Tamer Arslan/Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

Question: Can it rain frogs, fish and other objects?

Answer: There have been reports of raining frogs and fish dating back to ancient times. Of course, it doesn't rain frogs or fish in the sense that it rains water. No one has ever seen frogs or fish appear out of the sky. However, some winds are powerful enough to lift animals, people, trees and houses. These strong winds usually appear during tornadoes and hurricanes. It is possible that they could suck up fish or frogs and drop them elsewhere.

Scientists Spell It Out

Many scientists think that something called tornadic waterspouts might be the cause of animal rainfalls. These are tornadoes that travel over the water. They are not as strong as land-based tornadoes, which can reach up to 310 miles per hour. But tornadic waterspouts can reach 100 miles per hour, which can still be quite destructive.

A popular misunderstanding is that waterspouts “rise out of the sea.” Actually, they begin in the air and descend toward the water’s surface. The first visible sign of a tornadic waterspout is usually a dark spot on the surface of the water. This is caused by a spinning column of air stirring up the water. As the spinning column of air, or vortex, becomes stronger, the surrounding water is pulled into a spiral pattern of light and dark bands.

Eventually a ring of spraying water forms around the base. Then the funnel extending from the sky toward the water's surface becomes visible. At this point, the waterspout is considered to be a mature storm.

Like a tornado, a waterspout has a central vortex and a rotating funnel of wind. The vortex is strong enough to "suck up" small objects like a vacuum. Later, these objects fall like rain.

Animals That Go Up, Must Come Down

Waterspouts are the most common explanation for animal rainfalls. Some scientists think that a very strong updraft could also lift small animals into the sky. An updraft is a type of wind current. During thunderstorms, updrafts can reach speeds of more than 60 miles per hour.

Scientists have used updrafts to explain several animal rainfalls. For example, scientists said a tornado made it rain frogs in Missouri in 1873. They said an updraft made it hail frogs in Iowa in 1882. No one has actually seen an updraft lifting frogs off the ground. Still, it is scientifically possible. Updrafts regularly pick up lightweight objects and carry them long distances.

Not all scientists agree about reports of raining animals. For one reason, some reports might not be true. Some people falsely report an animal rainfall after seeing large numbers of little creatures on the ground after a storm. However, they did not fall from the sky. Instead, storms drove small animals out of their homes. People who live in cities tend to underestimate the number of animals that live around them. So they might think the animals came from the sky rather than their natural homes.

Fish Falling "All Over The Place"

Although scientists remain uncertain, a number of eyewitness reports strongly suggest animal rainfalls on occasion. For example:

On October 23, 1947, a scientist was eating breakfast at a restaurant in Louisiana when the waitress told him that fish were falling from the sky. “Automobiles and trucks were running over them. Fish also fell on the roofs of houses. ... I personally collected ... a large jar of perfect specimens,” he said.

In February 2010, people in a small town in Australia saw hundreds of fish fall from the sky. Christine Balmer was walking home when they started raining down. “These fish fell in their hundreds and hundreds all over the place. The locals were running around everywhere to pick them up,” she said.

Quiz

1 Which two of the following are MAIN ideas of the article?

1. *Scientists do not agree about reports of animal rainfalls.*
2. *Very few people have ever seen an animal rainfall.*
3. *Animal rainfalls are most likely caused by some kinds of strong winds.*
4. *People who live in cities may falsely report animal rainfalls.*

(A) 1 and 2

(B) 1 and 3

(C) 2 and 4

(D) 3 and 4

2 Which sentence from the article would be MOST important to include in a summary of the article?

(A) Many scientists think that something called tornadic waterspouts might be the cause of animal rainfalls.

(B) They are not as strong as land-based tornadoes, which can reach up to 310 miles per hour.

(C) People who live in cities tend to underestimate the number of animals that live around them.

(D) In February 2010, people in a small town in Australia saw hundreds of fish fall from the sky.

3 Read the paragraph from the section "Scientists Spell It Out."

Like a tornado, a waterspout has a central vortex and a rotating funnel of wind. The vortex is strong enough to "suck up" small objects like a vacuum. Later, these objects fall like rain.

Which word from the paragraph helps the reader understand what a "vortex" does?

(A) central

(B) objects

(C) vacuum

(D) rain

4 Read the sentence from the section "Animals That Go Up, Must Come Down."

Instead, storms drove small animals out of their homes.

Which of the following words could BEST replace the word "drove" without changing the meaning of the sentence above?

(A) helped

(B) forced

(C) allowed

(D) supported