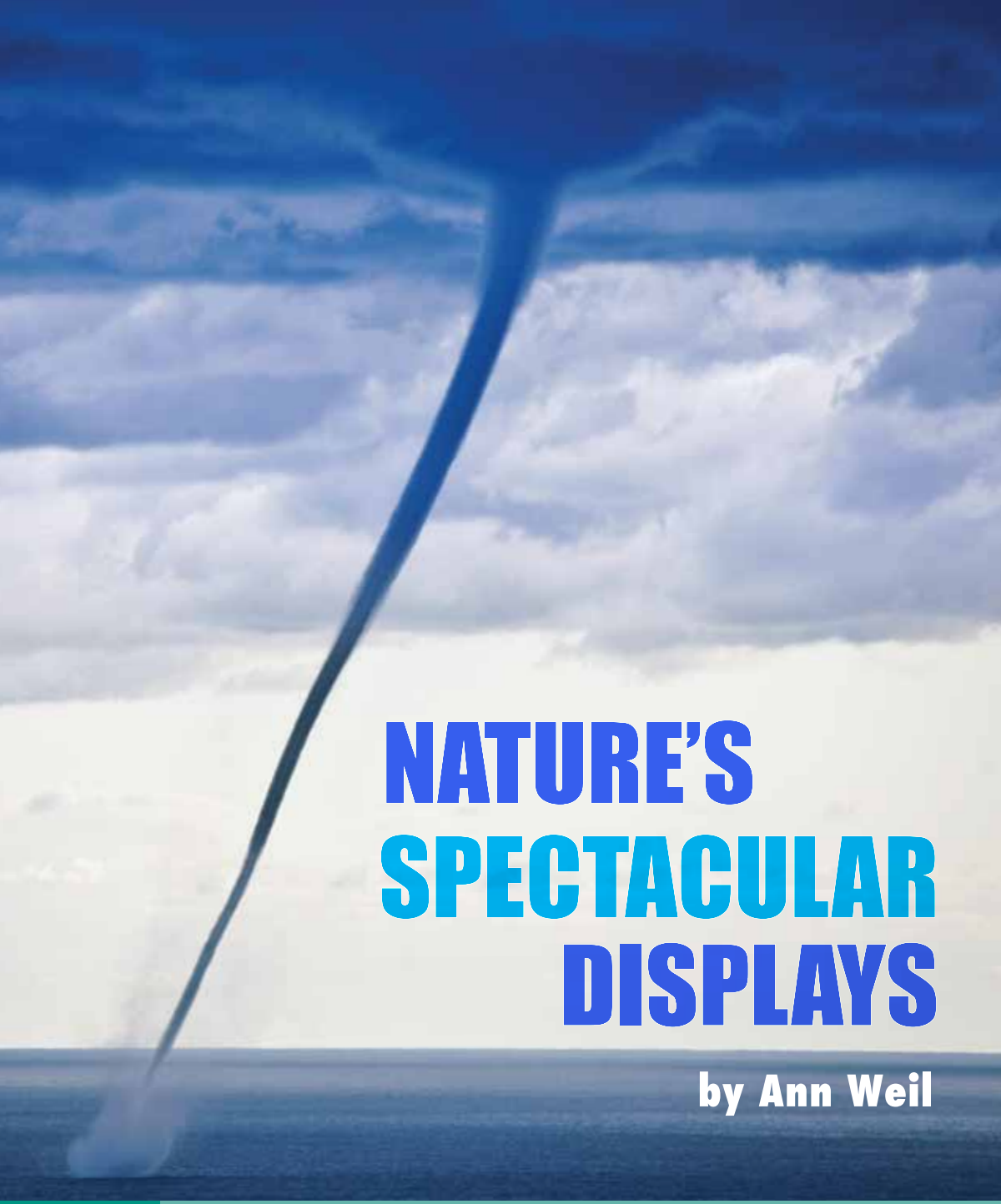

NATURE'S SPECTACULAR DISPLAYS

by Ann Weil

Amplify Atlas™

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Have you ever heard someone say, "It's raining cats and dogs"? They mean that it's pouring rain, so grab your umbrella before heading outside.

But in some places, animals, including fish and frogs, have indeed fallen out of the sky. And that's not the only way nature can surprise us. It has put on some great shows that you might expect to see only in the movies.

Fish have fallen on the people of Lajamanu three times since 1974.

Waterspouts

A rain of animals may seem unusual, but not to the people of Lajamanu, Australia. In 1974, people reported watching tiny fish fall from the sky. The fish thudded upon the ground and rooftops. Decades passed, and it rained fish again.

In 2005, a similar event occurred in the small European country of Serbia. When dark clouds rolled in and gusty winds picked up, the townspeople expected a rainstorm. Instead, they reported a downpour of frogs.

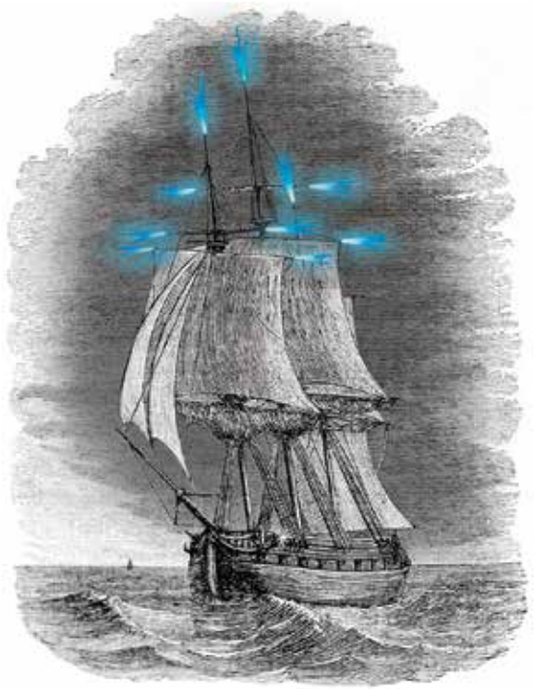
How can animals possibly fall from the sky? **Waterspouts** may be the answer. Waterspouts are **funnels**, or cone-shaped tubes, of spinning air that form over oceans, rivers, lakes, and ponds. Their swirling winds may pick up animals living in that water and carry them inland, where they fall like rain.

While waterspouts are fascinating, the next natural phenomenon will sound like a sailor's **legend**, or old story.

A waterspout is a tornado that forms over water.

Saint Elmo's Fire

Sailors claim to have seen blue lights glowing around the **masts**, or poles, of ships. This mysterious event has come to be known as Saint Elmo's Fire. But what causes it?



Long ago, sailors saw St. Elmo's Fire at the top of a mast.

Saint Elmo's Fire occurs during thunderstorms, but it is not lightning. With lightning, electricity travels from a cloud to the ground, while with Saint Elmo's Fire, a hissing, crackling electric charge from the storm produces the **eerie**, or spooky, glowing blue light.

Frog storms and ghostly glowing lights aren't the only natural phenomenon to **astonish**, or surprise, people. Even the sun has been responsible for some unusual events.

Sundogs

Sunlight looks white, but it's made of bands of color. When sunlight passes through raindrops, it bends, and all of its colors are displayed in a rainbow. Nearly everyone has seen a rainbow after a rain shower, but how many of us have seen a colorful dog move across the sky?

This strange event occurs when clouds of ice crystals form high in the sky. Sunlight bends as it passes through these crystals, forming a rainbow-colored patch. This sundog, as it is called, appears to follow the sun across the sky, like a faithful dog.

What do raining animals, hissing blue lights, and moving rainbow-colored dogs have in common? They are all examples of how nature can surprise us.

Sundogs can appear at any time throughout the year.

Glossary

astonish (v.): to amaze or surprise

eerie (adj.): spooky; creepy

funnels (n.): cone-shaped tubes

legend (n.): an old story

masts (n.): tall poles that rise from the deck of a ship and support the sails

waterspouts (n.): tornadoes that form over water

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