

Rubber Duckies Map The World

Oceanographer Tracks Bath Toys To Study Ocean Movement

By Lauren Johnston



A lone duck washes ashore. (CBS)

(CBS) On what was, of course, a dark and stormy night, an unlikely traveler set off on an incredible journey through high seas and arctic ice--it was a tiny rubber duck.

For more than 11 years now, oceanographer Curt Ebbesmeyer has been learning about movement on the ocean by tracking the travels of thousands of bathtub toys, reports **CBS News Correspondent John Blackstone**.

Along with the ducks there are frogs, turtles and beavers, all victims of an accident on the high seas.

"It's amazing what a duck can teach you," Ebbesmeyer says. "There was one container load of turtles, ducks, beavers and frogs, twenty-nine thousand in a single container that went overboard in the middle of the Pacific," he says.

The small, plastic adventurers were accidentally dumped into the ocean in January 1992. Pushed by winds and currents the ducks were carried to Alaska where thousands washed ashore.

But hundreds more would have been swept up thru Bering Straight and so far north they would be frozen in the Arctic icepack. Moving slowly with the ice across the Pole, Ebbesmeyer predicted the frozen flotilla would take five or six years to reach the North Atlantic and thaw.

Now 11 years after being dumped overboard, some ducks have appeared bobbing off beaches from Maine to Massachusetts.

Ebbesmeyer has faith that there are numerous ducks waiting to be found along the East Coast, though none have yet been recovered.

If you're wondering how on earth a two-inch rubber duck could withstand being frozen for years in the Arctic ice, then be thrashed about during fierce North Atlantic storms, **CBS' Blackstone** found the answer.

These ducks were designed to withstand the rigors of a two-year-old's bathtime.

"Little babies can be very rough on toys," says Darlene Hollywood of First Years, the manufacturing company that makes the ducks.

First Years is offering a \$100 reward to anyone who finds one of the well-traveled bath toys.

"It's really a critical piece of scientific data," Hollywood says.

But until one of the toys is found, the journey remains theoretical.

Ebbesmeyer now refers to the rogue floaters as "the most wanted ducks," and is appealing to everyone at the beach to watch closely this summer for blots of bright yellow in the surf, and help retrieve his rubber ducks.

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