

Sunday, July 01, 2007

<http://www.blazingtalons.com/2007/07/rubber-duckies-are-landing.html> (Accessed 22 May, 2008)

The Rubber Duckies Are Landing!

15 years ago in 1992, rubber ducks - known as Friendly Floaties - were being shipped from Hong Kong to the US when three 40 foot containers fell into the Pacific Ocean after a storm. It sent nearly 30,000 rubber duckies out into the perilous waters.



20,000 of them went southward...washing ashore several months later in Australia, Indonesia, and even South America.

For the remaining 10,000 Friendly Floaties, their journey was just beginning. This Rubber Armada went north, lazily floating towards Alaska and the Beiring Strait. There, they met the harsh Arctic Ice. Incredibly, they managed to move a mile per day while frozen in ice, continuing their amazing North-West route towards the Atlantic Ocean.



Curtis Ebbesmeyer, (pictured left) an oceanographer based out of Seattle, has been tracking them from the very beginning. He and other scientists have been very interested in the Friendly Floaties' journey, tracking their route and using that information to learn more about global ocean currents.

"They are a nice tracer for what the currents are doing as they travel around the world, and currents are what determines our climate, and cycles of carbon," said Simon Boxall, of the

National Oceanography Centre in Southampton, UK.

After the ducks survived the Arctic Ice, it was in 2000 when they were tracked in the North Atlantic. In 2001, they were found to be floating right over the area where the Titanic sank. Seems like the mighty vessel has nothin' on these rubber ducks!

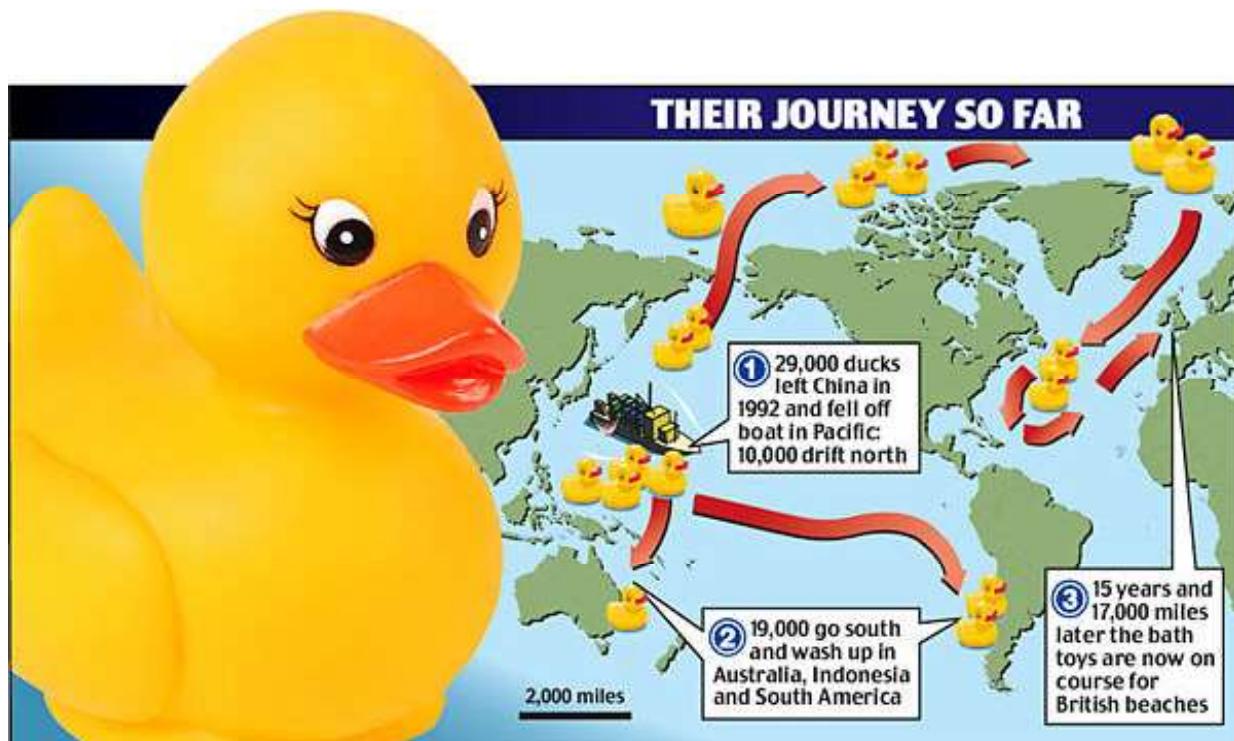
They continued to float, and in 2003, scientists thought the Rubber Armada might make shore on America's Atlantic coast. The manufacturer, The First Years Inc. then put a bounty on each duckies head worth a \$100 savings bond! (Only for those found in New England, Iceland, and Canada). Many scientists thought this was going to be the end of the Rubber Armada's odyssey.

They were wrong. The rubber duckies that didn't wash up in the US have continued to travel in the Atlantic, and 17,000 miles and 15 years later are now heading towards Britain. They have lost their color, but these tough little ducks are still going strong.



Will they indeed hit the British beaches in the coming days? Computer models say it will happen. How about those Friendly Floaties that don't come ashore?

Their amazing voyage will continue...



MainSail News 29 / 06 / 07

Look out for plastic ducks

By Cathy Brown

<http://www.themainsail.com/news/article/mps/uan/1487> (Accessed 25 August, 2008)

Curtis Ebbesmeyer with Friendly Floatees If you are sailing off the south west of England, or the west coast of Ireland or Scotland this summer, look out for faded plastic ducks. And if you see one, pick it up: it could be worth money, both as a collectors' item and for scientific research!

For the past 15 years American oceanographer Curtis Ebbesmeyer has been tracking nearly 30,000 plastic bath toys, made in China, which were released into the Pacific Ocean when a container was washed off a cargo ship in a freak storm.

He expects that some of the ducks, known as Friendly Floatees, will soon reach Britain after a journey of nearly 17,000 miles, having crossed the Arctic Ocean frozen into pack ice, bobbed the length of Greenland and been carried down the eastern seaboard of the United States.

Mr Ebbesmeyer, who is based in Seattle, said that those that had not been trapped in circulating currents in the North Pacific, crushed by icebergs or blown ashore in Japan are bobbing across the Atlantic on the Gulf Stream, according to a recent report in *The Times*.

Any beachcomber who finds one of the ducks will be able to claim a \$100 (£50) reward from the toys' American distributor, First Years Inc.

The ducks were being shipped from Hong Kong to Tacoma, Washington, on the north-west coast of the USA when their container fell into the Pacific on January 29, 1992. Two thirds of them floated south through the tropics, landing months later on the shores of Indonesia, Australia and South America. But about 10,000 headed north and by the end of the year were off Alaska and heading back westwards.

It took three years for the ducks to circle east to Japan, past the original drop site and then back to Alaska on a current known as the North Pacific Gyre before continuing north towards the Arctic, said Mr Ebbesmeyer.

Many were stranded as the currents took them through the Bering Strait, which divides Alaska from Russia. He predicted that they would spend years trapped in the Arctic ice, moving at the rate of one mile a day towards the Atlantic.

In 2000, eight years after their journey began, some of the ducks were reported in the North Atlantic and in 2003, when they were expected to wash up on the east coast of America, First Years Inc announced the reward.

By now the ducks had been bleached white by the sun and sea water. Sightings in the past two years have been few and far between, but oceanographers believe that their next likely landfalls are southwest England, southern Ireland and western Scotland.

Simon Boxall, of the National Oceanography Centre in Southampton, said that the ducks offered a great opportunity for climate change research.

"They are a nice tracer for what the currents are doing as they travel around the world, and currents are what determines our climate, and cycles of carbon," he said.

"I would ask holidaymakers to keep an eye out, as they might be very few and far between by now. It's a real adventure story and the plastic should last 100 years, so we hope it will continue."

The ducks' landfalls have all been logged on a computer model called the Ocean Surface Currents Simulation, which is used to help fisheries and find people lost at sea. Two children's books have been written about the saga and the ducks have become collector's items, changing hands for upwards of £500.

In fact it's not just ducks. The flotilla of Floatee bath toys consists of yellow ducks, green frogs, blue turtles and red beavers, each marked with the logo 'The First Years.'

Dr Ebbesmeyer first found out about the Floatees when a few made their first landfall, drifting onto the shores of Alaska in November 1992. He persuaded the shipping company that had lost the container to give him the exact time and position at which the toys entered the water.

Linking up with computer expert James Ingraham, he made a model to predict where the ducks would travel and published his findings in 1994 in an academic paper. Since then, the ducks have made their way around the world.

Every year, between 2,000 to 10,000 containers are lost overboard, resulting in a lot of floating debris. The observation of the Floatees, as they drift around the world, is helping scientists to understand the spread of pollution through the once-pristine oceans.

The first Floatee to be found in Britain was a faded green frog which reached the Hebrides in 2003, and Mr Ebbesmeyer believes we may now be on the brink of an invasion.

For more information visit Mr Ebbesmeyer's website www.beachcombersalert.org