

Ireland reports first venomous snake bite in its history, right before St. Patrick's Day

By Gillian Brockell, Washington Post on 03.12.20

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Level MAX



The first venomous snake bite reported in Irish history was by a puff adder. The venomous snake is native to semiarid regions, which Ireland is not. Photo: Bernard Dupont/Wikimedia Commons. Licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0

The miracles of the saints just aren't appreciated like they used to be.

A 22-year-old Dublin, Ireland, man was hospitalized after being bitten by a snake — the first venomous snake bite reported in Irish history, according to the Irish Post — just weeks before the world celebrates St. Patrick's Day.

Legend has it that Saint Patrick drove the snakes from Ireland more than 1,500 years ago. Despite this obvious blessing, people can still import them, even venomous ones, as pets.

This was apparently the case with the man who was bitten in late February by a puff adder, a venomous snake native to semiarid regions (that is, not Ireland).

Connolly Hospital, where the man is being treated, had to request antivenin from the National Reptile Zoo, the only authorized holder of antivenin in Ireland, according to RTE. But the zoo didn't have any, so it had to be shipped in from Liverpool in the United Kingdom.

St. Patrick is believed to have lived in the 5th century, though his exact birth and death dates are unclear. He is credited with bringing Christianity to Ireland. The story about his banishment of snakes didn't emerge until the 13th century, according to historian Roy Flechner in "Saint Patrick Retold: The Legend and History of Ireland's Patron Saint."

Jocelyn of Furness, one of St. Patrick's first biographers, described the story like this:

"Therefore he, the most excellent pastor, bore on his shoulder the staff of Jesus, and aided by the angelic aid . . . gathered together from all parts of the island all the poisonous creatures into one place; then compelled he them all unto a very high promontory . . . and by the power of his word he drove the whole pestilent swarm from the precipice of the mountain headlong into the ocean."

Even in the 13th century, this story was met with some skepticism. Gerald of Wales, author of a popular travelogue of Ireland, wrote:

"Some indulge in the pleasant conjecture that Saint Patrick and other saints of the land purged the island of all harmful animals. But it is more probably that from the earliest time and long before the foundation of the faith, the island was naturally without these as well as other things."

Scientists say Gerald is right. The island was too cold for snakes during the last Ice Age, up until about 10,000 years ago. And it has been separated from Europe for some time — unlike Britain, which had a land bridge up until about 6,500 years ago — so snakes couldn't get there once things warmed up.

The bitten man's condition is unknown; a media representative for the hospital did not respond to a request for an update.

With the luck (and medical care) of the Irish, hopefully he will be feeling better by St. Patrick's Day.



Quiz



Question 1 of 4

Read the paragraph from the article.


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Which idea is BEST supported by this paragraph?

-
- A** There are multiple reliable sources that report the story of St. Patrick's removal of snakes from Ireland.

Correct Answer

- B** Despite the legend about St. Patrick, there are scientific explanations for the lack of snakes in Ireland.
-
- C** Most of Ireland's snakes crossed over to Britain on a land bridge before the last Ice Age.
-
- D** There are more venomous snakes in continental Europe than there are in Britain.
-

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Quiz



Question
2 of 4

Correct Answer
C

Read the following paragraph from the article.

Legend has it that Saint Patrick drove the snakes from Ireland more than 1,500 years ago. Despite this obvious blessing, people can still import them, even venomous ones, as pets.

Which of the following can be inferred from this paragraph?


A Sometime after St. Patrick cleansed Ireland of snakes, a few managed to return.

B St. Patrick was terrified of snakes because he thought they symbolized evil.

Correct Answer

C It is likely that the puff adder that bit a man in Ireland was imported to the country as a pet.

D Most Irish people believe the legend of St. Patrick and credit him with the absence of snakes on the island.

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Quiz



Question
3 of 4

Correct Answer
A

Why did the author conclude the article by wishing that the man feels better by St. Patrick's Day?

Correct Answer

- A** to highlight the coincidence of the man being bitten so close to St. Patrick's Day
- B** to illustrate the importance of St. Patrick's Day in Irish history and culture
- C** to describe how long it usually takes for someone to recover from a poisonous snake bite
- D** to explain something the man was looking forward to after he is released from the hospital

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Quiz



Question 4 of 4

How does the article develop the idea that the legend of St. Patrick has been contested for a long time?

A

by describing the difficulties some people have had trying to remove snakes from much smaller areas

B

by describing evidence from the 13th century that supports the presence of snakes in Ireland at that time


Correct Answer

C

by including historical sources that support and deny the legend, as well as the current scientific consensus

D

by including an account by Jocelyn of Furness that explains how St. Patrick removed the snakes

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