**The Animals Caught ‘Raining’ from the Sky**

While most beard wearers may be concerned about keeping lunch out of their facial hair, Ian Watson of Goulburn, New South Wales had something more alarming threatening his.

For a week, the residents of Goulburn experienced a rainfall of spiders, covering their homes in swarms of, thankfully tiny, spiderlings.

Watson appreciated the phenomenon, calling it beautiful, but complained that they kept getting stuck in his beard. (1) I’d take a crumb of sandwich any day.

What beardless people might find more concerning is that spider rains are not that uncommon. They are a form of spider transportation known as ballooning (2), lockdown not required, spiders do it all the time. They climb to high ground, release their silk, and take off. What’s less common is millions of spiders doing this at the same time, creating a shower of teeny arachnids. It usually happens when the weather has delayed ballooning, causing a backlog of frustrated, eight-legged holidaymakers. When the weather conditions finally improve, millions of the critters all take off at once, therefore raining back down to Earth en masse.

While spiders may be willing participants in this weird weather, there are records dating back to the second century A.D. of, less thrilled, animals diving from the heavens. Greek philosopher Heraclidides Lembus wrote of a frog fall, so great, that people had to abandon their homes. Apparently, so many of the slimy amphibians fell in Paeonia and Dardania that, despite efforts to kill them, the frogs were so numerous it was impossible to eat, drink or walk without crunching one. No, locals were not grateful for the extra protein. They finally gave up and deserted the country when the smell of the dead frogs became overpowering. (3) Seems reasonable, it sounds worse than beard spiders.

More recent accounts include a shower of tadpoles in Japan in 2009 (4), a downpour of worms falling in hideous clumps in Louisiana in 2007 (5) and a deluge of frogs on a small town in Serbia in 2005 (6). Although, seemingly unflappable climatologist Slavisa Ignjatovic declared the event ‘not very unusual.' Stating that it could be, logically, explained by the strong winds of a nearby storm picking up the unsuspecting beasties. Don’t feel too bad for those frogs though, the ones deposited on Iowa, in 1882, were actually frozen into hailstones before pelting residents (6).

The most plausible explanations provided for these animal rains are waterspouts (7). These are tornado-like whirlwinds, spinning up to 100 mph, formed when large storm clouds swirl over bodies of water. They can dip into ponds and lakes and suck up unfortunate creatures. As they travel over land they lose their energy and drop their loads, heaviest first. This causes all equally well-fed frogs to bombard an area at once.

The theory is supported by records of nearby storms occurring alongside many of the animal rain incidents reported. However, there are many waterspout sceptics who believe there are still too many unanswered questions such as; why is it only ever one type of creature falling and not a range of similarly sized victims (6)? And, why do the accounts describe the discovery of creatures on the ground rather than the actual plummeting part? Finally, Charles Fort, an early collector of reports about strange phenomena, wrote "It is so easy to say that small frogs that have fallen from the sky had been scooped up by a whirlwind ... but [this explanation offers] no regard for mud, debris from the bottom of a pond, floating vegetation, [or] loose things from the shores — but a precise picking out of the frogs only. ... Also, a pond going up would be quite as interesting as frogs coming down.' (8)

1. <https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2015/05/18/spiders-rain-australian-town-goulburn_n_7305192.html>
2. <https://www.livescience.com/50856-spider-rain-explained.html>
3. Barnett C, 2016, *Rain: A Natural and Cultural History*, Crown Publishers
4. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/jun/17/japan-rain-tadpoles>
5. <https://www.kplctv.com/story/6797945/raining-worms-in-jennings/>
6. <https://www.loc.gov/everyday-mysteries/item/can-it-rain-frogs-fish-and-other-objects/>
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8. <https://www.livescience.com/44760-raining-frogs.html>