Dan
Hello and welcome to 6 Minute English – the show that brings you an interesting topic, authentic listening practice and vocabulary to help you improve your language skills. I'm Dan…

Catherine
And I'm Catherine. In this programme we'll be discussing mermaids, as well as teaching you 6 new items of vocabulary, of course…

Dan
How would you like to be a mermaid?

Catherine
A half-human and half-fish? Well, Dan, I think it's all a myth.

Dan
Well, then you'll find this week's question a bit of a difficult one to answer.

Catherine
I suppose I will. Go on then.

Dan
When did the most recent alleged mermaid sighting take place? Was it a) the 1400s b) 1800s or c) 2000s?

Catherine
Ok, and by alleged, you mean 'said or believed to be true but not proven'. I don't believe in mermaids, but I think there's a lot of people who do, so I will say c) the 2000s.

Dan
Well, we'll find out if you're right a bit later on. So, what do you know about mermaids, Catherine?
Catherine
Well, a mermaid is a creature that's similar in appearance to a woman but instead of legs, a mermaid has the tail of a fish. The males are called mermen, and they live in the ocean. I thought they were a myth.

Dan
They certainly appear to be mythical. They feature in legends and stories from all over the world. The earliest known one in a story dates from ancient Assyria, around 1000 BC. Can you think of a more modern example?

Catherine
Many people will be familiar with the Disney story, 'The Little Mermaid'.

Dan
Yes. Before it was an animated movie, it was a renowned fairy-tale written by Hans Christian Andersen, first published in 1837. Interestingly, a small bronze statue of the little mermaid has been sitting in Copenhagen in Denmark since 1913.

Catherine
There you go! There's no real evidence.

Dan
What if I told you that over 200 mermaids have recently gathered in Greensboro, North Carolina in the USA?

Catherine
You're telling me fish tales, Dan

Dan
Ok. I'll confess. They aren't real mermaids. Each person is a normal human wearing a waist-high latex tail. They meet to share an interest in aquatic mythology, take underwater photos, and swim. For many of them, it's a source of income too! Listen to Daniel Craig, five year merman, explain.

INSERT
Daniel Craig, merman
A lot of the mermaids we have attending here are professional mermaids. They will entertain at birthday parties, social events, company events. I stumbled across the mermaiding community merely by accident.

Catherine
So it's a job too! A professional merman. And Daniel said that he stumbled across it, or 'found it by accident'. So, it doesn't really count then though, does it Dan?
Dan
A real, real mermaid? That's a different kettle of fish, which is an idiomatic phrase that means 'a completely different matter or issue'. Well, while we have no hard evidence, such as a photo of a real mermaid, there have been several sightings. One of the more recent ones was in 2009 in Haifa Bay.

Catherine
Hang on now, that rings a bell! That's in Israel, isn't it? And it allegedly appeared at sunset. Apparently the mermaid was doing tricks.

Dan
There you go then!

Catherine
But there is no reason, Dan, to believe that it was anything other than a hoax, which means 'a deception or lie – often done for humour or sometimes cruelty'. Well, real or not, it could be fun to be a mermaid. I wonder what it would be like?

Dan
Well, that I can help with. Let Daniel Craig explain why he likes it so much.

INSERT
Daniel Craig, merman
It's just serene. It's the perfect place for a temporary getaway.

Catherine
So he likes it because it's serene, which means 'calm and peaceful'.

Dan
Yes and he says it's the perfect getaway, which is 'a place you go in order to escape from normal life'.

Catherine
Well, I still don't believe in mermaids, but I do believe, Dan, that you asked me a question.

Dan
I definitely did. I asked, when did the most recent alleged mermaid sighting take place? Was it a) the 1400s b) 1800s or c) 2000s?

Catherine
And I said I think it was the 2000s

Dan
And you have hit the nail on the head. Well done.
Catherine
Thank you

Dan
You're right. It was the 2000s. It was in 2012 in Zimbabwe and it was reported by the water resource minister. Let's take a look at the vocabulary from this programme. Our first word was **alleged**. If something is **alleged** it is 'said or believed be true but not proven to be true'. Can you think of a recent example, Catherine?

Catherine
US President Donald Trump has alleged that newspapers have been printing fake news, but apparently there's no proof. And our next one was **stumbled across**. So, if you **stumble across** something you 'encounter or find it by accident'. It's a phrasal verb and you could also say **come across**. So, Dan, have you ever **stumbled across** anything unusual?

Dan
Well, there was a time when I was going to a party in Holborn and I got completely lost. And there on the floor in front of me I **stumbled across** a map of London. It got me straight to the party.

Catherine
Spooky.

Dan
The next one after that was **a different kettle of fish**. **A different kettle of fish** is an idiomatic phrase which means 'a completely different matter or issue'. You could also use the phrase 'a horse of a different colour'.

Catherine
Next up, we had **hoax**. And a **hoax** is 'a deception or lie – which is often done for humour or cruelty'. What was the last hoax you did, Dan?

Dan
One Christmas I wrapped a broken lightbulb in a box and gave it to mother as a present. I pretended to drop it and the broken lightbulb made a glass shattering noise and she thought that I had broken her present. After that we heard **serene**. **Serenity** means 'calm and peaceful'. The noun is serenity. What's your idea of serene, Catherine?

Catherine
Two weeks, lying on the beach, drinking lemonade, listening to the sound of the sea. Fabulous. And finally we had **getaway**. **A getaway** is an informal word meaning 'a place you go in order to escape from normal life', such as a holiday. So, where's your favourite getaway, Dan?
My favourite getaway is my yoga class. I find it really, really refreshing. Well, that's the end of today's 6 Minute English. Please join us again soon!

Catherine
And we are on social media too, so make sure to visit us on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube.

Both
Bye!