

by Scott_LaFee

VERBATIM

BRAIN SWEAT - When are the best odds of winning a game of chance: 12:50 p.m. or 12:55 p.m.? CNS Photo. WHAT IS IT? - This is a scanning electron micrograph of a melting snowflake. CNS Photo. JUST ASKING - If a pig loses its voice, it is disgruntled? CNS Photo. TRUE FACTS - Too much snow can drive you crazy, a condition the Inuit call pibloktoq. Symptoms include hysteria, senseless repeating of words and a desire to run naked in the snow. CNS Photo. SPITTING IMAGE - A new species of spitting cobra -- the largest in the world -- has been identified and named by researchers. CNS Photo. Never try to walk across a river just because it has an average depth of 4 feet.

- Martin Friedman

BRAIN SWEAT

When are the best odds of winning a game of chance: 12:50 p.m. or 12:55 p.m.? (Warning: This is a trick question. We apologize in advance.)

ANTHROPOLOGY 101

In China, it was once tradition to remove the pillows under a dying person's head. It was believed that if a person died looking at his feet, misfortune would be visited upon the surviving children.

BRAIN SWEAT ANSWER

At 12:55 p.m., because it's "5 to 1." At 12:50 p.m., it's just "10 to 1."

ANECDOTAL EVIDENCE

Georg de Hevesy (1885-1966) was a Hungarian chemist who received a Nobel Prize for his co-discovery of the element hafnium. Early in his career, he was living at a boardinghouse where he became suspicious of the food being served.

One night, when his landlady wasn't looking, he sprinkled a fatty piece of meat on his plate with a microscopic amount of radioactive material.

The next day's boardinghouse dinner menu featured "meat hash." Hevesy pulled out a Geiger counter and ran it over his plate. The device clicked frantically. Hevesy left the table and the boardinghouse.

JUST ASKING

If a pig loses its voice, is it disgruntled?

SPITTING IMAGE

A new species of spitting cobra - the largest in the world - has been identified and named by researchers. No, it's not called the Giant Scary Snake.

Dubbed Ashe's spitting cobra after the late James Ashe, a noted herpetologist, the snake can reach lengths of more than 9 feet and is believed to deliver more venom with a single bite than any other cobra known. (It contains enough venom to kill 15 people.)

Scientists had thought the snake, which is found in the dry lowlands of East Africa, was simply a brown-colored variant of the black-necked spitting cobra, but blood and tissue analyses indicate it is a distinct species.

Spitting cobras eat eggs, carrion, lizards, birds and other snakes. They bite like other snakes. The ability to spit venom is used in self-defense, often aimed at the attacker's eyes to give the snake a chance to escape.

'TRUE FACTS'

The editors of Discover magazine have come in from the cold with "20 Things You Didn't Know About Snow." The whole list will appear in next month's issue, but here's a dusting:

- Snow is a mineral, just like diamonds and salt.

- Too much snow can drive you crazy, a condition the Inuit call pibloktoq. Symptoms include hysteria, senseless repeating of words and a desire to run naked in the snow.

- In the last decade, 270 people have died in avalanches in the United States; 20 percent of them in Colorado.

- There have been substantiated reports of red, yellow or black snow falling from the sky.

- Freshly fallen snow is 90 percent to 95 percent air.

ELECTRON INK

National Geographic Science

science.nationalgeographic.com

An adjunct to the magazine's established Web site, this new endeavor emphasizes breaking space and science news. However, there are also lots of photo galleries and interactive applications, from exploring a virtual body to watching space shuttle highlights.

WHAT IS IT? ANSWER

A scanning electron micrograph of a melting snowflake.

Eureka! Daily discoveries for the scientifically bent by Scott_LaFee