

by Scott LaFee

ANECDOTAL EVIDENCE

In 2004, British physiotherapist Chris McDonnell conducted extensive research on banana peels in various states of decay to determine whether they are as hazardous as conventional wisdom and slapstick movies suggest. McDonnell concluded the banana peel threat was grossly overstated.

TRUE FACTS - India ink does not come from India. It originates from China, and was first mistakenly referred to as 'India ink' by English diarist Samuel Pepys in 1665. CNS Photo. A few weeks later, McDonnell was shopping in a supermarket when he slipped and fell. Sitting up, he spied the cause: a banana peel.

VERBATIM

The chessboard is the world; the pieces are the phenomena of the universe; the rules of the game are what we call the laws of nature. The player on the other side is hidden from us. We know that his play is always fair, and patient. But also we know, to our cost, that he never overlooks a mistake, or makes the smallest allowance for ignorance.

- Thomas Henry Huxley, English biologist (1825-95)

BRAIN SWEAT

Can you translate the following into a well-known and much simpler saying?

Scintillate, scintillate, globule of vivific

Fain would I fathom thy nature specific

Loftily poised above the capacious

Closest resembling a gem carbonaceous.

'TRUE FACTS'

Rice paper is not made from rice, but from the pith of the rice-paper tree, a small Asiatic member of the ginseng family. And India ink does not come from India. It originates from China, and was first mistakenly referred to as "India ink" by English diarist Samuel Pepys in 1665.

THE NOSE KNOWS

Oenophile is the snooty term for a wine connoisseur. But it turns out that the only real requirement for distinguishing between the black cherry bouquet of a pinot noir and the black currant scent of a cabernet sauvignon is, well, a snoot.

A new study by Northwestern University researchers found that just a few lengthy sniffs of a particular aroma allows the brain to become fairly adept at differentiating among all related smells. In the study, volunteers were exposed continually to a single odor for 3 1/2 minutes. Half of the subjects sniffed a minty odor; the other half a floral odor.

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"When you have prolonged sensory experience with one smell, you become an expert for smells that are part of that original category," said principal investigator Dr. Jay Gottfried.

But the news is not all wine and roses. Testing showed that the expertise may not be permanent, though it does seem to last for at least 24 hours.

Or one dinner party.

ELECTRON INK

Is that you calling or a blue-throated macaw? Forget buying cell phone ringtones from your favorite band or song. The nonprofit Center for Biological Diversity is offering free ringtones of 40 endangered species, from beluga whales to yellow-legged frogs. It's part of an effort to raise public awareness of the plight of

endangered species. For more information and downloadable tones, visit www.rareearthtones.com.

SURELY YOU'RE JOKING

WHAT IS IT? - This is a photograph of a tiny daphnia or 'water flea' as it swims across the surface of a pool. CNS Photo. A rabbit and a beaver are looking up at the Hoover Dam. The rabbit lauds the dam as a monument to engineering brilliance. The beaver nods, modestly. "I didn't actually build it," the beaver says, "but it's based on my idea."

POETRY FOR SCIENTISTS

From way down in my cranium

This prediction I will make:

That if you eat uranium,

You'll get atomic ache.

- Ted Shoemaker

BRAIN SWEAT ANSWER

"Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star"

What Is It answer

A tiny daphnia or "water flea" swims across the surface of a pool, creating a surprisingly large disturbance that is photographically captured by J. Rudi Strickler of the University of Wisconsin. Each animal swims somewhat differently, creating its own unique "footprint in water." These footprints help distinguish between predators, prey and mates.

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Eureka! Daily discoveries for the scientifically bent by Scott LaFee