

by Scott LaFee

BRAIN SWEAT

If you randomly glance at your watch, what are the odds that the time will contain consecutive digits, such as 1:23?

VERBATIM

"Ants can carry 20 times their own body weight, which is useful information if you're moving and you need help carrying a potato chip across town."

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BRAIN SWEAT ANSWER

There are 10 times in a day that have consecutive digits (1:23; 2:34; 3:45; 4:56 and 12:34 - both a.m. and p.m.). Thus, in a 24-hour or 1,440-minute day, the probability is 1 in 144 (1,440 divided by 10).

PRIME NUMBERS

3: Percentage reduction in the density of the Earth's atmosphere by 2017 due to carbon dioxide emissions

92: Percentage of global opium produced in Afghanistan in 2006

1: Number of whales accidentally struck each month by ships entering or exiting Boston harbor

Sources: National Center for Atmospheric Research; Pennsylvania State University; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime; International Maritime Organization

SEALS' MEALS LAST LONGER

Remember the childhood warnings about swimming after eating? Gray seals take it a step further: They don't dive and digest.

Researchers at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland were curious about how seals and other marine mammals deal with the metabolic demands of both finding food and digesting it at the same time.

Seals hunt and eat on the run, but diving and digesting are energy-intensive activities, and it seemed unlikely that seals do both simultaneously. Carol E. Sparling and colleagues concluded that they don't.

Sparling set up an experiment in which researchers offered seals underwater prey at set intervals, then measured the seals' metabolic rate when they returned to the surface. They found that the seals' metabolic rate was up to seven times higher than baseline during extended periods when the seals were languishing motionless on the surface. These periods were most often at night, and frequently many hours after the end of feeding dives.

The scientists can't say what's happening to the seals' meals between initial consumption and ultimate digestion. It's possible that the animals somehow delay the release of digestive enzymes or prevent peristalsis - the muscle action that pushes food through the digestive tract.

TRUE FACTS - Buzz Aldrin's mother's maiden name was Moon. Aldrin was the lunar module pilot on the Apollo 11 mission in 1969 and the second human to set foot on the moon (after Neil Armstrong). CNS Photo.'TRUE FACTS'

- Flamingo tongues were a common delicacy during Roman times.

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- The strength of early lasers was unofficially measured in "gillettes" - the number of razor blades a given beam could penetrate.

ANTHROPOLOGY 101

The Romans believed that cutting your hair at sea brought bad luck. The belief persisted in the Royal Navy, where British sailors got haircuts only during violent storms, the logic being that the weather couldn't get worse. JUST ASKING

Why does "cleave" mean both split apart and stick together?

WHAT IS IT ANSWER

A scanning electron micrograph of a cabbage white butterfly egg.

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