

by Scott_LaFee

WHERE IN THE WORLD? ANSWER

PRIME NUMBERS - About 40,000 birds die each year in this country from flying into wind turbine blades. CNS Photo. WHERE IN THE WORLD - This is a picture of the Isles of Scilly, an archipelago of approximately 150 islands 27 miles southwest of the westernmost point of England. CNS Photo. OUR IGNOBEL HISTORY - Do chickens prefer beautiful people? CNS Photo. THE AIR UP THERE - Scientists are developing a system to locate and identify passengers who are releasing germs inside airline cabins. CNS Photo. The Isles of Scilly is an archipelago of approximately 150 islands located roughly 27 miles southwest of the westernmost point of England (Land's End). The islands are an eroded remnant of granite rock that intruded into the Earth's crust from deeper underground. Humans have inhabited the isles for more than 4,000 years.

ANTHROPOLOGY 101

In northern India, a man who has lost more than two wives will try to shake off his perceived bad luck by marrying a plant.

BRAIN SWEAT

Why are these cities ordered in this way: Kabul, Buenos Aires, Canberra, Vienna, Brussels, Rome, Moscow?

PRIME NUMBERS

4,217 - Average amount, in dollars, that human egg donors are compensated in the United States

58.05 - Average amount, in feet, California's coastal cliffs have retreated over the past 70 years

40,000 - Estimated number of birds that die each year flying into American wind turbine blades

\$495 - Amount, in dollars, that the estate of actor James Doohan (Scotty on "Star Trek") paid to have his ashes rocketed into orbit

4.86 billion - Number of years it would take our fastest spacecraft, Apollo 10, to reach Gliese, a newly discovered planet that scientists think might be capable of supporting life

Sources: Slate.com; USGS; U.S. National Academy of Sciences; Space.com

BRAIN SWEAT ANSWERS

These are national capitals, listed alphabetically by country: Afghanistan, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Italy, Russia.

'TRUE FACTS'

The Web site and search engine Yahoo! was originally called "Jerry and David's Guide to the World Wide Web," after its two founders, Jerry Yang and David Filo. According to company lore, Yahoo! is an acronym for "Yet Another Hierarchical Official Oracle," though Yang and Filo say they chose the name because they liked the general definition of a yahoo: a rude, unsophisticated, uncouth person.

OUR IGNOBEL HISTORY

In 2002, three scientists at the University of Stockholm in Sweden sought to answer the burning question: Do chickens prefer beautiful people?

They exposed six chickens (*Gallus gallus domesticus*) trained to peck at a computer screen to photos of seven human faces - men and women of varying degrees of attractiveness.

The scientists noted how often the chickens pecked at each picture, then compared this behavior with 14 college students who were asked simply to pick pictures, not peck at them.

The chickens and the students tended to choose the same beautiful faces of the sex opposite their own, proving (sort of) that chickens do indeed prefer beautiful people.

For their work, the Swedish scientists won the 2003 Ig Nobel Prize for Interdisciplinary Research.

THE AIR UP THERE

If you fret about the general healthiness of cramming together sneezing, coughing passengers in an airplane, this news might help you breathe a bit easier: Purdue University scientists are developing a system to locate and identify passengers who are releasing germs - or worse - inside airline cabins.

"The goal is to be able to track the source if a person released a biological agent, such as anthrax, or inadvertently released a pathogen, such as pandemic flu, by sneezing," said Qingyan Chen, a professor of mechanical engineering at Purdue.

In a paper to be published in the journal *Indoor Air*, Chen and colleagues describe a system that uses sensors placed throughout an airliner's cabin and mathematical models to trace the source of detected airborne substances back to an area the size of a single airline seat.

Researchers have tested their ideas by re-creating a commercial airliner's passenger compartment, complete with rows of seating. The system appears to work, but it is currently too slow for practical use, requiring several days to crunch the data and determine the source.

The goal, of course, is to perfect a system that works in real time and pinpoints a contaminant's source before a plane lands.

Until then, hold your breath.

JUST ASKING

Why is the alphabet in that order? Is it because of the song?

VERBATIM

• The first rule of intelligent tinkering is to save all the parts.

- Stanford University population scientist Paul R. Ehrlich

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