

Scholars who studied liars, put pants on rats win Ig Nobels

September 22 2016, by Mark Pratt



Atsuki Higashiyama, from Ritsumeikan University in Japan, speaks after receiving the Ig Nobel Perception Prize during ceremonies at Harvard University in Cambridge, Mass., Thursday, Sept. 22, 2016. Higashiyama was awarded the prize for investigating whether things look different when you bend over and view them between your legs. (AP Photo/Michael Dwyer)

A Swede who wrote a trilogy about collecting bugs, an Egyptian doctor who put pants on rats to study their sex lives and a British researcher

who lived like an animal have been named winners of the Ig Nobels, the annual spoof prizes for quirky scientific achievement.

The winners were honored—or maybe dishonored—Thursday in a zany ceremony at Harvard University.

The 26th annual event featured a paper airplane air raid and a tic-tac-toe contest with a brain surgeon, a rocket scientist and four real Nobel laureates.

Winners receive \$10 trillion cash prizes—in virtually worthless Zimbabwean money.

This year's Ig Nobels, sponsored by the science humor magazine *Annals of Improbable Research*, included research by Fredrik Sjöberg, who published three volumes about collecting hoverflies on the sparsely populated Swedish island where he lives.

It sounds downright dull, but Sjöberg's books are a hit in his homeland, and the first volume's English translation, "The Fly Trap," has earned rave reviews.

"I had written books for 15 years (read by no one) when I finally understood it's a good thing to write about something you really know, no matter what that might be," Sjöberg said in an email, describing the award as the pinnacle of his career.

"The Ig Nobel Prize beats everything," he said. "At last I hope to become a rock star. Leather pants, dark sunglasses, groupies. All that."



Nobel laureates Rich Roberts (physiology or medicine, 1993), right, Dudley Herschbach (chemistry, 1986) third from right, and Eric Maskin (economics, 2007), second from left, compete in a game of "tic-toc-toe" with a brain surgeon during the Ig Nobel award ceremonies at Harvard University in Cambridge, Mass., Thursday, Sept. 22, 2016. (AP Photo/Michael Dwyer)

Ahmed Shafik decided rats needed pants.

He dressed his rodents in polyester, cotton, wool and polyester-cotton blend pants to determine the different textiles' effects on sex drive. The professor at Cairo University in Egypt, who died in 2007, found that rats that wore polyester or polyester blend pants displayed less sexual activity, perhaps because of the electrostatic charges created by polyester. He suggested that the results could be applied to humans.

The study did not explain how he measured a rat's waist and inseam.

Charles Foster, a fellow at the University of Oxford in the United

Kingdom, won for literally living like an animal. He spent months mimicking a badger, an otter, a fox, a deer and a bird in an attempt to see the world through their eyes, then wrote a book, "Being a Beast," about his experiences.

He lived as a badger in a hole in a Welsh hillside; rummaged like a fox through trash cans in London's East End looking for scraps of chicken tikka masala and pepperoni pizza; and was tracked by bloodhounds through the Scottish countryside to learn what it's like to be a deer.



Human Aeorodrome Eric Workman acts as a target for paper airplanes during the Ig Nobel award ceremonies at Harvard University in Cambridge, Mass., Thursday, Sept. 22, 2016. (AP Photo/Michael Dwyer)

It wasn't much fun.

"I was hunted down quite quickly," he said.

Andreas Sprenger was part of a team at the University of Luebeck in Germany that found that if you have an itch on one arm, you can relieve it by looking in a mirror and scratching the opposite arm. Sound silly? But imagine, Sprenger said via email, if you have a skin condition with an intolerable itch, you can scratch the other arm to relieve it without rubbing the affected arm raw.

Gordon Logan, a professor of psychology at Vanderbilt University, and colleagues from Canada and Europe won for their research on lying. Their study of more than 1,000 people who are ages 6 to 77—"From junior to senior Pinocchio: A cross-sectional lifespan investigation of deception"—found that young adults are the best liars.

How do the scientists know their subjects weren't lying to them?

"We don't," Logan said.



Thomas Thwaites, left, accepts the Ig Nobel prize in biology from Nobel laureate Eric Maskin (economics, 2007) during ceremonies at Harvard University in Cambridge, Mass., Thursday, Sept. 22, 2016. Thwaites, of the United Kingdom, won for creating prosthetic extensions of his limbs that allowed him to move like and to roam in the company of goats. (AP Photo/Michael Dwyer)



Atsuki Higashiyama, left, from Ritsumeikan University in Japan, accepts the Ig Nobel Perception Prize from Nobel laureate Rich Roberts (physiology or medicine, 1993) during ceremonies at Harvard University in Cambridge, Mass., Thursday, Sept. 22, 2016. Higashiyama was awarded the prize for investigating whether things look different when you bend over and view them between your legs. (AP Photo/Michael Dwyer)



Fredrik Sjöberg, left, of Sweden, accepts the Ig Nobel award in literature from Nobel laureate Dudley Herschbach (chemistry, 1986) during ceremonies at Harvard University in Cambridge, Mass., Thursday, Sept. 22, 2016. Sjöberg's research led him to publish three volumes about collecting hoverflies on the sparsely populated Swedish island where he lives. His books are a hit in his homeland and the first volume's English translation, 'The Fly Trap,' has earned rave reviews. (AP Photo/Michael Dwyer)



Nobel laureates, front row from left, Dudley Herschbach (chemistry, 1986), Eric Maskin (economics, 2007), Rich Roberts (physiology or medicine, 1993) and Roy Glauber (physics, 2005) are introduced during the Ig Nobel award ceremonies at Harvard University in Cambridge, Mass., Thursday, Sept. 22, 2016. (AP Photo/Michael Dwyer)



Master of Ceremonies Marc Abrahams holds up the 2016 Ig Nobel award during ceremonies at Harvard University in Cambridge, Mass., Thursday, Sept. 22, 2016. (AP Photo/Michael Dwyer)



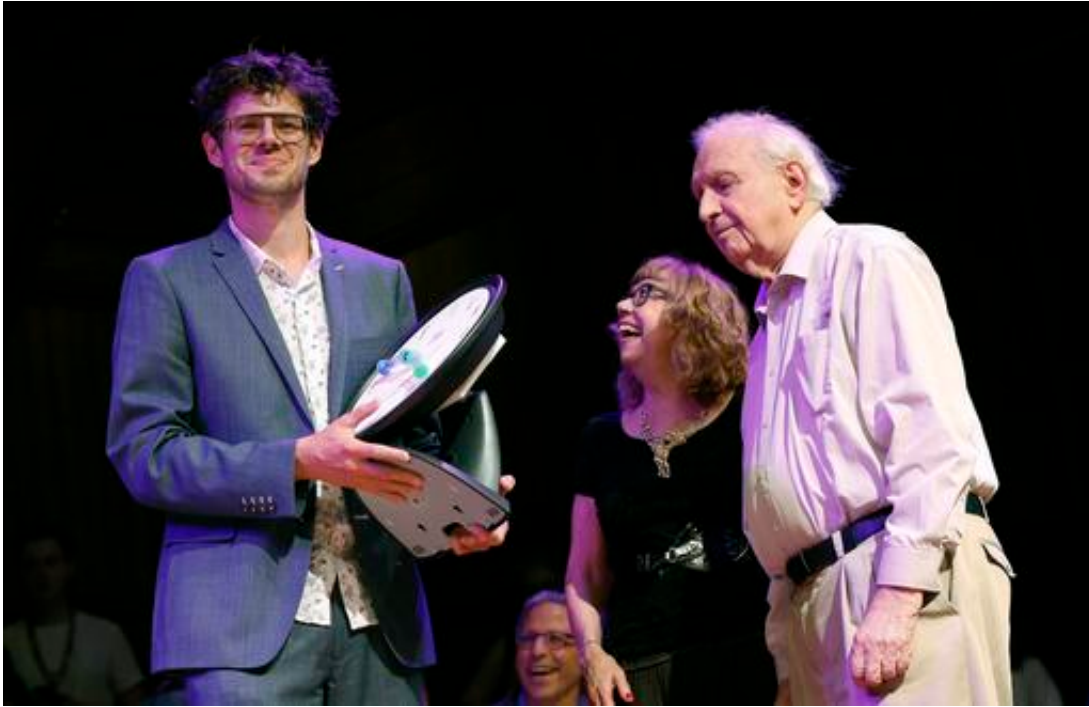
Atsuki Higashiyama, left, from Ritsumeikan University in Japan, accepts the Ig Nobel Perception Prize from Nobel laureate Rich Roberts (physiology or medicine, 1993) during ceremonies at Harvard University in Cambridge, Mass., Thursday, Sept. 22, 2016. Higashiyama was awarded the prize for investigating whether things look different when you bend over and view them between your legs. (AP Photo/Michael Dwyer)



Susanne Akesson, left, accepts the Ig Nobel prize in physics from Nobel laureate Dudley Herschbach (chemistry, 1986) during ceremonies at Harvard University in Cambridge, Mass., Thursday, Sept. 22, 2016. Akesson, from Lund University in Sweden, was part of a team that discovered why white-haired horses are the most horsefly-proof horses and for discovering why dragon flies are fatally attracted to black tombstones. (AP Photo/Michael Dwyer)



Andreas Sprenger, left, accepts the Ig Nobel award in medicine from Nobel laureate Rich Roberts (physiology or medicine, 1993) during ceremonies at Harvard University in Cambridge, Mass., Thursday, Sept. 22, 2016. Sprenger was part of a team at the University of Luebeck in Germany that found that if you have an itch on one arm, you can relieve it by looking in a mirror and scratching the opposite arm. (AP Photo/Michael Dwyer)



Bruno Verschuere, from the University of Amsterdam in the Netherlands, accepts the Ig Nobel award in psychology from Nobel laureate Roy Glauber (physics, 2005), right, during ceremonies at Harvard University in Cambridge, Mass., Thursday, Sept. 22, 2016. Verschuere was part of a team that won for their research on lying. Their study of more than 1,000 people between the ages of 6 and 77—'From junior to senior Pinocchio: A cross-sectional lifespan investigation of deception'—found that young adults are the best liars. (AP Photo/Michael Dwyer)



Charles Foster speaks after receiving the Ig Nobel prize in biology during ceremonies at Harvard University in Cambridge, Mass., Thursday, Sept. 22, 2016. Foster, a fellow at the University of Oxford in the United Kingdom, won for literally living like an animal. He spent months mimicking a badger, otter, fox, deer and bird in an attempt to see the world through their eyes, then wrote a book about his experiences called 'Being a Beast.' (AP Photo/Michael Dwyer)



Audience members throw paper airplanes during the Ig Nobel award ceremonies at Harvard University in Cambridge, Mass., Thursday, Sept. 22, 2016. (AP Photo/Michael Dwyer)

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Citation: Scholars who studied liars, put pants on rats win Ig Nobels (2016, September 22) retrieved 10 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2016-09-scholars-liars-pants-rats-ig.html>

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