

Constipated scorpions, love at first sight inspire Ig Nobels

September 16 2022, by MARK PRATT



Master of Ceremonies Marc Abrahams poses with the 2022 Ig Nobel prize, Friday, Sept. 9, 2022, at his office in Cambridge, Mass. The prize was emailed in advance to the winners with instructions for self-assembly. The annual prize ceremony on Thursday, Sept. 15, 2022, was for the third year in a row a prerecorded affair because of the lingering effects of the coronavirus pandemic. Abrahams also holds a Zimbabwean \$10 trillion bill that is part of the prize presented to the winners. Credit: AP Photo/Michael Dwyer

The sex lives of constipated scorpions, cute ducklings with an innate sense of physics, and a life-size rubber moose may not appear to have much in common, but they all inspired the winners of this year's Ig Nobels, the prize for comical scientific achievement.

Held less than a month before the actual Nobel Prizes are announced, Thursday's 32nd annual Ig Nobel prize ceremony was for the third year in a row a prerecorded affair webcast on the [Annals of Improbable Research magazine's](#) website.

The winners, honored in 10 categories, also included scientists who found that when people on a blind date are attracted to each other, their heart rates synchronize, and researchers who looked at why legal documents can be so utterly baffling, even to lawyers themselves.

Even though the ceremony was prerecorded, it retained much of the fun of the live event usually held at Harvard University.

As has been an Ig Nobel tradition, real Nobel laureates handed out the prizes, using a bit of video trickery: The Nobel laureates handed the prize off screen, while the winners reached out and brought a prize they had been sent and self-assembled into view.

Winners also received a virtually worthless Zimbabwean \$10 trillion bill.

Curiosity Ig-nited? Learn more about some of the winners:

GET YOUR DUCKS IN A ROW

"Science is fun. My sort of a tagline is you're not doing science if you're not having fun," said Frank Fish, a biology professor at West Chester University in Pennsylvania who shared the physics Ig Nobel for studying why ducklings follow their mothers in single-file formation.

It's about [energy conservation](#): The ducklings are drafting, much like stock cars, cyclists and runners do in a race, he said.



Eric Martinez, a graduate student in the Department of Brain and Cognitive Science at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, holds a Zimbabwean \$10 trillion bill, Friday, Sept. 9, 2022, in Cambridge, Mass. Martinez, who also has a law degree from Harvard University, shared the literature Ig Nobel with Francis Mollica and Edward Gibson for analyzing what makes legal documents unnecessarily difficult to understand. The 32nd annual Ig Nobel prize ceremony on Thursday, Sept. 15, 2022, was for the third year in a row a prerecorded affair because of the lingering effects of the coronavirus pandemic. Credit: AP Photo/Michael Dwyer

"It all has to do with the flow that occurs behind that leading organism and the way that moving in formation can actually be an energetic benefit," said the appropriately named Fish, whose specialty is studying how animals swim.

He shared the prize with researchers at the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow, Scotland, who found that the ducklings actually surfed in their mother's wake.

THAT SYNCING FEELING

Eliska Prochazkova's [personal experiences](#) inspired her research on dating that earned her and colleagues the cardiology Ig Nobel.

She had no problems finding her apparent perfect match on dating apps, yet she often found there was no spark when they met face-to-face.

So she set people up on blind dates in real social settings, measured their physiological reactions and found that the heart rates of people attracted to each other synchronized.

So is her work evidence of "love at first sight"?

"It really depends, on how you define love," Prochazkova, a researcher at Leiden University in the Netherlands, said in an email. "What we found in our research was that people were able to decide whether they want to date their partner very quickly. Within the first two seconds of the date, the participants made a very complex idea about the human sitting in front of them."

A CRUEL STING

Solimary García-Hernández and Glauco Machado of the University of São Paulo in Brazil won the biology Ig Nobel for studying whether constipation ruins a scorpion's sex life.



Shigeru Watanabe, of Japan, receives the Ig Nobel award in chemistry for estimating the total saliva volume produced per day by a typical five-year-old, Sept. 12, 2019, at Harvard University, in Cambridge, Mass. The 32nd annual Ig Nobel prize ceremony on Thursday, Sept. 15, 2022, was for the third year in a row a prerecorded affair because of the lingering effects of the coronavirus pandemic. Credit: AP Photo/Elise Amendola, File

Scorpions can detach a body part to escape a predator—a process called autotomy. But when they lose their tails, they also lose the last portion of

the digestive tract, which leads to constipation—and, eventually, death, they wrote in the journal "Integrated Zoology."

"The long-term decrease in the locomotor performance of autotomized males may impair mate searching," they wrote.

THAT'S A MOOSE, DUMMY

Magnus Gers won the safety engineering Ig Nobel for making a moose "crash test dummy" for his master's thesis at KTH Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm, which was published by the Swedish National Road and Transport Research Institute.

Frequent moose vs. vehicle collisions on Sweden's highways often result in injuries and death to both human and animal, Gers said in an email. Yet automobile makers rarely include animal crashes in their safety testing.

"I believe this is a fascinating and still very unexplored area that deserves all the attention it can get," he said. "This topic is mystical, life threatening and more relevant than ever."

CAN YOU SPEAK LEGALESE?

Anyone who has ever read a terms of service agreement knows that legal documents can be downright incomprehensible.

That frustrated Eric Martinez, a graduate student in the brain and cognitive science department at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology who also has a law degree from Harvard.

He, Francis Mollica and Edward Gibson shared the literature Ig Nobel

for analyzing what makes legal documents unnecessarily difficult to understand, research that appeared in the journal "*Cognition*."

"Ultimately, there's kind of a hope that lawyers will think a little more with the reader in mind," he said. "Clarity doesn't just benefit the layperson, it also benefits lawyers."

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