



Strange But True Facts

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There are many strange but true facts that we hear or read about without actual registering the unusual context. And there are other facts that we may never have even heard about.

Did you know that:

- *There is an annual ghost mela held in Madhya Pradesh?
- *Switzerland attracts the most suicide tourists?
- *Sicily is seen upside down from an Italian village?
- *A new Japanese jeans actually slows down ageing?
- *In ancient times, iron cost more than gold?
- *Silver can destroy 650 disease-causing bacteria?
- *Mahavira wasn't really the founder of Jainism?
- *There's a fruit that "smells like shit but tastes like heaven"?
- *The banana could be extinct in 10 years?
- *There is a plant that goes searching for water?
- *The Puffer Fish contains a poison that is 500 times deadlier than cyanide, yet it's a delicacy in Japan?

The book uncovers the latest unusual facts to amuse, amaze and enthrall you, and also boost your current affairs and general knowledge.

Through this plethora of strange but true facts, readers will learn a lot about India and the world's unusual past, present and future.

Truly an unputdownable book!



About the author:

Clifford Sawhney has over 19 years' experience in the print media, corporate communications and publishing industry.

Besides writing a plethora of articles on varied topics, he has also edited a couple of magazines and helped launch five periodicals.

Currently a consultant in the print media and publishing industry, the author carries the same professional touch with his foray into book publishing.

Strange But True Facts is his third book for Pustak Mahal, after Medical Jokes & Humour and The World's Greatest Seers & Philosophers.

PREFACE:

Strange but true facts hold a fascination for every individual and the author is no exception. Occasionally, strange facts hit one square on the jaw and set the mind thinking. For instance, why would the Puffer fish be a delicacy in Japan when its poison is 500 times deadlier than cyanide and there is no known antidote?

At other times, the strange facts happen to be sitting right under our noses and we never take notice. In this category are two words, lakh and crore, which are not English words at all, although English-speaking Indians have been using them for generations as legal English tender!

The facts in this book span every gamut of human and non-human affairs and would be of interest to readers with widely differing palates.

This first edition of The Handbook of Strange But True Facts is simply the beginning. There are literally hundreds and thousands of strange but true facts that could not be incorporated in the first edition due to space constraints. As the years and the editions advance, a game of musical chairs will ensure that facts fall by the wayside to allow a berth for new facts.

Readers are welcome to write in with their comments or to submit new facts at: cliffsaw@rediffmail.com.

- Clifford Sawhney

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EXCERPTS:

TIDBITS

On his 78th birthday, Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee received a card that was over half a mile long and covered 1,470 sheets of paper. In making the card, over 750 pens and 200 bottles of ink were used.

Ram Babu from Lucknow can mimic the calls of 329 different animals and birds as well as 50 types of vehicles!

Did you know that the words 'lakh' and 'crore' do not exist in the English language? The two words are only used in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh and are derivatives of the Hindi words laakh and karod.

Vinoba Bhave burnt all his certificates in his youth. One day, while sitting with his mother in the kitchen, he set the certificates afire, telling his mother that he did not require them, as his direction in life was different. Giving up his studies in 1916, he joined Mahatma Gandhi's ashram.

Dr BR Ambedkar, the messiah of the Dalits, was so poor in his childhood that the family could only afford a one-room tenement in Bombay. Since there wasn't enough space in the house for the entire family to sleep, Ambedkar and his father took turns in sleeping at night!

India has no rabbits in the wild - only hares!

ANIMAL ANTICS

America's Barking Crow

You know that parrots and mynahs can imitate humans, right? But here's a tidbit you wouldn't know: the American crow can bark like a dog!

The Blue Jay is Not Blue

While the Blue Jay's feathers may appear to be blue, this is actually an optical illusion and not a real pigment.

Bat Home

According to Ripley's Believe it or Not, Ekambar Sahu of India allows over 4,000 bats to take refuge in his house every day at sunrise.

World's Smallest Deer

The world's smallest deer is the lesser Malayan Chevrotain or Mouse Deer, which stands only eight to ten inches tall at the shoulder and weighs just two to three kilos.

The Fish that Walks

A native of northern China, the meat-eating snakehead fish has razor-sharp teeth and actually walks on its fins and breathes out of water.

Synthetic Glow Worms

Paul Giannaris from Canada has invented a chemical formula that makes worms glow in the dark! This is excellent news for



anglers, as the glowing worms are good for bait fishing.

The Bald Eagle isn't Bald

Did you know that the bald eagle, America's national bird, isn't actually bald? In fact, it has white feathers on its head, neck and tail.

Why then, you may wonder, is it referred to as the bald eagle? Bald is actually a derivative of the old English word *balde*, which once meant white! So the eagle is named for its white feathers and not for the lack of it!

Pets Paradise

The Golden Paw pets-only hotel in San Diego, California, is sheer heaven for cats. At this hotel, cats can sleep in a deluxe suite overlooking a birdfeeder with an aquarium, a television and an attendant in a rocking chair who will pet the animal.

Berlin Artist Plans Brothel for Dogs

The year 2003 might see brothels of a different kind. A German artist has applied for "a licence to open a brothel in Berlin for sexually frustrated dogs", according to news reports. The man says it will be the first of its kind anywhere in the world.

Karl Friedrich Lenze, 54, revealed that he plans to charge dog owners \$27 (around Rs.1,300) for "half an hour of happiness".

Says Lenze: "If dogs can't get what they want, they get cranky - just like people."

The dog brothel would offer clients a variety of carefully vetted "employees" of both sexes, rooms for private encounters and even a "bar" where customers could sniff out their preferred partners.

Classical Music at Austrian Animal Shelters

Animal shelters in Austria have begun a new scheme to calm homeless cats and dogs by playing them classics. The Linz Animal Shelter has spent thousands of pounds in a sound system to play classical music throughout the building because this has a calming effect on the animals, particularly dogs.

Randy Elephants

Elephants are supposedly renowned for their memory. It seems they are now earning notoriety too. A herd of African elephants at Longleat Safari Park in Wiltshire, England, are indulging in sexual antics that are supposedly "too X-rated". The "frisky herd" includes a bull elephant and four females. And their antics mean the space they currently enjoy is no longer enough as they need "more room to manoeuvre".

The elephants are now being readied for transport to a new "purpose-built facility" at the Zoo Parc de Beauval at St. Aignan in France, where they will be the core animals in a captive breeding programme.

Tiger Cub to Scare Thieves

With a series of burglaries rocking the village of Selisten Dol in western Bulgaria, residents found a novel way out. They purchased a tiger cub from the Sofia Zoo to guard their village. The ploy worked. The thieves have stopped thieving around in the village.

Snake Mail

Singapore postal staff were scared out of their wits when a couple of snakes crawled out of a mailbag. A 22-year-old man will be charged for illegally bringing wildlife into the city-state.

The parcel, in fact, contained a total of 14 baby milk snakes and six geckos valued at \$1,704. A man who came to collect the parcel was detained. Under Singaporean law it is illegal to bring live animals without a permit. He could be fined up to \$1,000 for each animal imported without approval.

Lioness Adopts Baby Oryx

Not all animals have an animal instinct. A barren lioness named Kamuniak in northern Kenya's Samburu National Park adopted her fifth newborn baby oryx in October 2002!

It seems the lioness is living up to her name, Kamuniak, which means "the blessed one" in the local Samburu language. For over a year, the lioness has been adopting baby oryxes. She has been going to the extent of trying to protect the calves from other predators, only allowing their natural mothers to come and feed them, according to a Kenya Wildlife Service warden.

While the calves eventually run away with their natural mothers or are "rescued" by park wardens, one baby oryx ended up as the snack of a male lion while Kamuniak was sleeping.

In 2002, the lioness last adopted a little calf that was nicknamed Naisimari (taken by force). Naisimari's natural mother was seen following her calf and the lioness at a distance!

In January 2003, the lioness adopted her sixth baby oryx within a span of one year! Said game warden Paul Lenogong: She adopted a sixth baby oryx of about three months. It cannot adopt cubs because of the viciousness of mothering lionesses, therefore it decides to take over calves of docile animals, which offer little or no violent resistance.

Lenogong revealed that experts who visited the park to witness the strange occurrence concluded that the lioness's urge to nurse young ones of another species was due to her own infertility. Kamuniak had first been noticed mothering a baby antelope in December 2001. Two weeks later, though, the little oryx had been made a meal of by another lion.

14-Foot Bird Spotted in Canada

Do birds the size of a small aeroplane still exist? Yes, according to residents from south-west Alaska. In October 2002, the Anchorage Daily News reported that villagers of Togiak and Manokotak saw a creature in the air that had a wingspan of around 14 feet.

Said Moses Coupchiak, 43, from Togiak: "At first I thought it was one of those old-time Otter planes. Instead of continuing towards me, it banked to the left and that's when I noticed it wasn't a plane."

Scientists also did not doubt that the people of the region had seen the winged creature, but they expressed scepticism about its reported size. Said raptor specialist Phil Schemf: I'm certainly not aware of anything with a 14-foot wingspan that's been alive



for the last 100,000 years.

Falcons in UAE Require Passports to Fly...

Believe it or not, some falcons in the UAE might now need passports to fly across borders! According to a report in the Khaleej Times, the United Arab Emirates is all set to issue passports to falcons in order to monitor the trade and movement of the birds across its borders. The passports will hold a three-year validity and cost 100 dirhams (Rs.1,200).

Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait are expected to follow in the footsteps of the UAE and implement a similar measure. The passport will feature the registration, the name and address of the owner, the origin of the bird and whether it is a pet or a wild bird.

The move is also meant to overcome the problems posed by a ban imposed on the movements of falcons by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), which was imposed following violations of rules regarding trade in wildlife. Falcons have been used for sport and hunting in the Gulf countries, as they are strong, fast fliers. For instance, the peregrine falcon can swoop down swiftly from a high altitude to attack prey at speeds of up to 180 miles per hour (290 kmph). Since the birds don't live for more than 20 years, they are constantly in demand to replenish lost birds. The sport of falconry is supposed to have begun about 2,000 years ago.

Chinese go Bonkers Over Pets

Thanks to Deng Xiaping, the winds of change have already impacted many aspects of Chinese life. The latest fad is pet ownership, once condemned in communist China as a bourgeois habit. And the situation is so bad that pet dogs are stolen from Taiwan and smuggled into China.

From puny Chihuahuas to huge German Shepherds, they are all on sale. A dog or cat can sell for between 5,000 yuan (US \$625) and 50,000 yuan (US \$6,250) in Beijing pet stores. The stealing is done because neither can China nor Taiwan breed pets fast enough to meet the burgeoning demand, reported a Taipei newspaper, the United Daily News.

The animals are smuggled across the 160-km-wide Taiwan Strait to China mainly by fishing boats, sometimes in sealed compartments, which can result in many of them dying. In the past decade, China is said to tolerate pet ownership, but with strict restrictions and a registration fee imposed to ensure the environment is kept clean.

Registering a dog in Beijing costs \$600 initially, with \$240 paid thereafter each year. To avoid paying the registration fees, many Chinese pet owners are said to keep pets in hiding.

Japanese Love Their Mini-pigs

If you are down in the dumps thanks to the vagaries of human affairs, you'll likely turn to your pet dog for comfort. Not the Japanese. They prefer pigs! Thanks to increasing unemployment and a cloudy future, the Japanese are seeking solace in their pet miniature pigs!

These miniature pigs are the latest craze for the Japanese when it comes to pets, thanks to their sweet nature and portly shapes. According to Emi Ito, who works at Saiboku Livestock Farm Corp in Saitama, near Tokyo: They are nice and fat, also very lovable. Ito should know - he has been a mini-pig fan for seven years. They're really comforting and round - and anything that comforts people is very popular in Japan right now.

Originally bred for lab use, the mini-pigs are around one-tenth to one-fifth the size of normal pigs and weigh between 45 and 130 pounds. By end-December 2002, around 600 people (most of them women) were said to own these "petite porkers".

About Pustakmahal Publishers

Pustak Mahal publishes an extensive range of books that are both affordable and high-quality.