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TRIVIA FACTS

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Honey Never Spoils

Archaeologists have found pots of honey in ancient Egyptian tombs that are thousands of years old and still edible. Honey's low moisture, high acidity and small amounts of hydrogen peroxide make it a very hostile environment for bacteria and mould.

Octopus Hearts

An octopus has three hearts and blue blood. Two hearts pump blood through the gills, while the third pumps it to the rest of the body. The blood is blue because it uses copper-based hemocyanin instead of iron-based hemoglobin to carry oxygen.

Bananas Are Berries

Botanically speaking, bananas are berries, while strawberries are not. A true berry develops from a single flower with one ovary and usually contains several seeds. Strawberries are 'aggregate accessory fruits', and their seeds sit on the outside.

The Shortest War

The Anglo-Zanzibar War of 27 August 1896 is often cited as the shortest war in recorded history. It lasted somewhere between 38 and 45 minutes before the Sultan's forces surrendered to the British Royal Navy.

The Growing Eiffel Tower

The Eiffel Tower can grow by up to about 15 centimetres in summer. Heat causes its iron structure to expand, and it shrinks back again in colder weather. It can also lean slightly away from the sun as one side heats faster than the other.

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Venus's Long Day

A day on Venus is longer than its year. Venus takes about 243 Earth days to rotate once on its axis, but only about 225 Earth days to orbit the Sun. It also spins backwards compared to most planets, so the Sun rises in the west there.

Cube-Shaped Poop

Wombats are the only known animals that produce cube-shaped droppings. Researchers found that varying elasticity in the walls of their intestines shapes the faeces into cubes, which may help the droppings stay put when wombats use them to mark territory.

Cleopatra and the Moon Landing

Cleopatra lived closer in time to the Apollo Moon landing than to the construction of the Great Pyramid of Giza. The pyramid was built around 2560 BC, Cleopatra died in 30 BC, and Apollo 11 landed on the Moon in 1969.

Oxford Older Than the Aztecs

The University of Oxford is older than the Aztec Empire. Teaching was taking place at Oxford by 1096, while the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan was founded in 1325, more than two centuries later.

Sharks Older Than Trees

Sharks have existed for around 450 million years, which makes them older than trees. The earliest trees appeared roughly 385 to 390 million years ago. Sharks have survived several mass extinctions, including the one that wiped out the dinosaurs.

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Lightning Strikes

Lightning strikes the Earth roughly 40 to 50 times every second, adding up to more than a billion flashes a year. Satellite data shows that most lightning happens over land, with hotspots in places like Lake Maracaibo in Venezuela and central Africa.

Breath-Holding Sloths

Sloths are surprisingly good swimmers and can hold their breath for up to 40 minutes underwater. They do this by slowing their heart rate dramatically, which is longer than many marine mammals such as dolphins can manage.

Scotland's National Animal

The national animal of Scotland is the unicorn. In Celtic mythology, the unicorn symbolised purity, innocence and power, and it appears on the Royal Coat of Arms of Scotland, often shown wearing a chain to show its strength was tamed.

Pluto's Unfinished Orbit

Pluto was discovered in 1930, but it has not yet completed a single orbit of the Sun since then. One Plutonian year lasts about 248 Earth years, so it will not complete its first full orbit since discovery until the 2170s.

Your Bacterial Body

Your body contains roughly as many bacterial cells as human cells. A 2016 estimate put the figure at about 38 trillion bacteria to around 30 trillion human cells. Most of these bacteria live in the gut and help with digestion and immunity.

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Neptune Found by Maths

Neptune was the first planet located through mathematical prediction rather than observation. Irregularities in the orbit of Uranus led French mathematician Urbain Le Verrier to calculate where another planet should be, and it was spotted near that spot in 1846.

Pink Flamingos

Flamingos are not born pink. Chicks are grey or white, and adults get their pink colour from carotenoid pigments in the algae and brine shrimp they eat. A flamingo on a diet lacking these pigments will gradually fade to a paler colour.

Great Wall Myth

Contrary to popular belief, the Great Wall of China is not visible to the naked eye from the Moon, and it is very hard to see even from low Earth orbit. Although extremely long, it is narrow and made of materials similar in colour to the surrounding land.

Koala Fingerprints

Koalas have fingerprints that are remarkably similar to human fingerprints, with loops and whorls that are hard to tell apart even under a microscope. Since koalas and humans are not closely related, the trait evolved independently, possibly to help grip branches.

Tardigrades in Space

Tardigrades, also called water bears, are microscopic animals that survived direct exposure to the vacuum and radiation of outer space during a 2007 experiment. They can also withstand extreme temperatures, pressures and dehydration by entering a dormant state.

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Strongest Muscle

Measured by the force it can exert, the masseter, the main muscle used for chewing, is often considered the strongest muscle in the human body. Working together, the jaw muscles can close the teeth with a force of around 90 kilograms on the molars.

Origin of 'Robot'

The word 'robot' comes from the Czech word 'robota', meaning forced labour. It was introduced in Karel Capek's 1920 play R.U.R. (Rossum's Universal Robots), and Capek credited his brother Josef with suggesting the term.

Ancient Living Tree

One of the oldest known living trees is a Great Basin bristlecone pine in California nicknamed Methuselah, which is more than 4,800 years old. Its exact location is kept secret by authorities to protect it from vandalism.

Peanuts Aren't Nuts

Despite the name, peanuts are not true nuts. They are legumes, related to beans, peas and lentils. Unlike most nuts, which grow on trees, peanuts develop underground after the plant's flower stalks bend down and push into the soil.

Butterflies Taste With Feet

Butterflies have taste receptors on their feet. When a female lands on a plant, she can 'taste' it to decide whether it is a suitable place to lay her eggs, making sure her caterpillars will have the right food when they hatch.

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A Murder of Crows

A group of crows is called a murder. The term dates back to at least the 15th century and likely comes from old folk tales and superstitions linking crows with death, since they were often seen scavenging on battlefields.

Taller Than Everest

Mount Everest is the highest mountain above sea level, but Hawaii's Mauna Kea is taller when measured from base to peak. Most of Mauna Kea sits underwater, and its total height from the ocean floor is over 10,000 metres, compared with Everest's 8,849 metres.

Cheetah Speed

The cheetah is the fastest land animal, capable of reaching speeds of around 100 to 120 km/h in short bursts. It can accelerate from 0 to about 100 km/h in just a few seconds, but it can only sustain its top speed for a few hundred metres.

Velcro Inspired by Nature

Velcro was inspired by burrs. In 1941, Swiss engineer George de Mestral noticed burdock burrs clinging to his dog's fur after a walk. Under a microscope he saw tiny hooks catching on loops, and he spent years developing the hook-and-loop fastener.

Accidental Penicillin

Penicillin was discovered by accident. In 1928, Alexander Fleming returned from holiday to find mould contaminating one of his bacterial cultures, and noticed that bacteria near the mould had been killed. It became the world's first widely used antibiotic.

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Old Sunlight

Sunlight takes about 8 minutes and 20 seconds to travel from the Sun to the Earth. That means when you look at the Sun, you are seeing it as it was over eight minutes ago. Light from the nearest other star, Proxima Centauri, takes over four years.

Largest Desert

The largest desert in the world is Antarctica. A desert is defined by low precipitation rather than heat, and the interior of Antarctica receives very little snow or rain each year. The largest hot desert is the Sahara.

Russia's Time Zones

Russia spans 11 time zones, more than any other country's contiguous territory. When it is morning in Kaliningrad in the west, it is already evening on the Kamchatka Peninsula in the far east.

Land of Lakes

Canada is estimated to contain more than half of all the lakes in the world. The country has hundreds of thousands of lakes, many carved out by glaciers during the last Ice Age, and holds a large share of the world's fresh surface water.

Wider Than the Moon

Australia is wider than the Moon. The Moon's diameter is about 3,474 kilometres, while mainland Australia stretches roughly 4,000 kilometres from east to west.

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Olympic Gold Medals

Olympic gold medals are not made of solid gold. Since 1912, they have been made mostly of silver, and modern rules require them to be plated with at least 6 grams of pure gold.

The First Computer Bug

In 1947, engineers working on the Harvard Mark II computer found a moth trapped in a relay and taped it into their logbook as the 'first actual case of bug being found'. Grace Hopper popularised the story, though 'bug' was already used for technical faults.

Vikings Without Horns

There is no evidence that Viking warriors wore horned helmets in battle. The popular image largely comes from costume designs for Richard Wagner's opera cycle Der Ring des Nibelungen in 1876. The only well-preserved Viking helmet found has no horns.

The Immortal Jellyfish

The jellyfish Turritopsis dohrnii is sometimes called the 'immortal jellyfish'. When stressed, injured or old, it can revert from its adult medusa stage back to an earlier polyp stage and start its life cycle again, potentially repeating the process indefinitely.

Shakespeare's Words

William Shakespeare is credited with the first recorded use of hundreds of English words and phrases, including 'eyeball', 'swagger' and 'bedroom'. Some may have existed in speech before him, but his plays are the earliest written sources we have for them.

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The Waggle Dance

Honeybees tell each other where food is by performing a 'waggle dance'. The angle of the dance shows the direction relative to the Sun, and its duration indicates distance. Karl von Frisch shared the 1973 Nobel Prize for decoding this behaviour.

The Drifting Moon

The Moon is slowly moving away from Earth at about 3.8 centimetres per year, roughly the speed fingernails grow. Scientists measure this precisely by bouncing lasers off reflectors left on the lunar surface by Apollo astronauts.

Saturn Would Float

Saturn's average density is lower than that of water, about 0.69 grams per cubic centimetre. In theory, if you could find a bathtub big enough to hold it, Saturn would float. It is the only planet in our solar system less dense than water.

Diamond Rain

Scientists believe it may rain diamonds deep inside Neptune and Uranus. Under the extreme pressure and heat inside these ice giants, carbon from methane may be squeezed into diamonds that sink slowly toward the planets' cores.

Hawaiian Alphabet

The Hawaiian alphabet has only 13 letters: five vowels (A, E, I, O, U), seven consonants (H, K, L, M, N, P, W), and the okina, a symbol representing a glottal stop. Because of this, Hawaiian words often feature many vowels.

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The Ghost Word 'Dord'

The 1934 edition of Webster's New International Dictionary contained the word 'dord', defined as density in physics. It was an error: a note meaning 'D or d' (abbreviations for density) was misread as a word. It went unnoticed for years before being removed.

Sudan's Pyramids

Sudan has more pyramids than Egypt. The ancient Kingdom of Kush built over 200 pyramids in what is now Sudan, mostly at sites like Meroe, compared with roughly 120 known pyramids in Egypt. Nubian pyramids are smaller and have steeper sides.

Napoleon Wasn't Short

Napoleon Bonaparte was not unusually short. He stood about 1.69 metres (around 5 feet 7 inches), average or slightly above for a Frenchman of his time. The myth arose partly from confusion between French and English inches and from British propaganda.

Goldfish Memory

The idea that goldfish have a three-second memory is a myth. Experiments have shown goldfish can remember things for months, and they can be trained to respond to sounds, colours and lights, or even to push levers to get food.

Flying Backwards

Hummingbirds are the only birds that can fly backwards in sustained flight. Their wings rotate in a figure-eight pattern, allowing them to hover, fly upside down briefly and move in any direction. Some species beat their wings more than 50 times per second.

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