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HEALTH & SCIENCE



ELIZABETH VON OEHSSEN/THE WASHINGTON POST

What face blindness looks like

Prosopagnosia can cause major practical and social difficulties. But sufferers develop strategies to compensate.

BY ANTHEA ROWAN

When Brad Pitt told an interviewer this year that he suffered from face blindness, the actor shared the loneliness of the condition: “Nobody believes me,” he said. But if you were in a room of 50 people, chances are that one of them might suffer from this rarely discussed condition. Not just Pitt but also primatologist Jane Goodall, and even the late neurologist and author Oliver Sacks. ¶ “Prosopagnosia,” from the Greek *prosopon* “face” + *agnosia* “ignorance” — or “face blindness” — is “a very specific

neurological symptom . . . [in which] a person loses the ability to recognize people’s faces but retains the ability to recognize that person by the sound of their voice” or other means, says Karen Postal, a clinical instructor in neuropsychology at Harvard Medical School. ¶ Studies suggest up to 2.5 percent of the population has “developmental prosopagnosia” — that is, they’ve had it since birth, Postal says. Acquired prosopagnosia is rarer and “can arise in a variety of neurological conditions, including stroke, tumor, and degenerative dementia.”

SEE FACE BLINDNESS ON E4

WELL+BEING

Chiropractors treat babies with unproven care

BY TEDDY AMENABAR

On TikTok, chiropractors are stretching chubby legs, massaging infant tailbones and tracing the tiny vertebrae of baby spines, touting a range of unproven treatments for newborns, babies and toddlers.

Dustin Judd runs a family chiropractic clinic in Corsicana, Tex., that regularly posts videos on the app that get a few thousand views each. But in July, a video showed Judd holding a 6-day-old baby, who rested in his hand as he massaged the infant’s back with a vibrating hand-held device. It went viral.

The baby “got his 1st adjustment and LOVED IT,” reads the caption. The video SEE BABIES ON E5



THIERRY ARDOUIN/TENDANCE FLOUE

MUSHROOMS

A mycology trek near Mount Everest. E2

ASK A DOCTOR

How much vitamin D do you need? E4

AGING

Weighing a pollution-dementia link. E4

Seeds: A love story in images

Sticklewort, or *Agri- monia eupatoria*, is a seed of the Rosaceae family. Thierry Ardouin photographed more than 500 seeds under a microscope to create a visual essay of enormous beauty and wonder.

Story and photos, E6

WELL+BEING

Sitting all day is harmful — even if you exercise

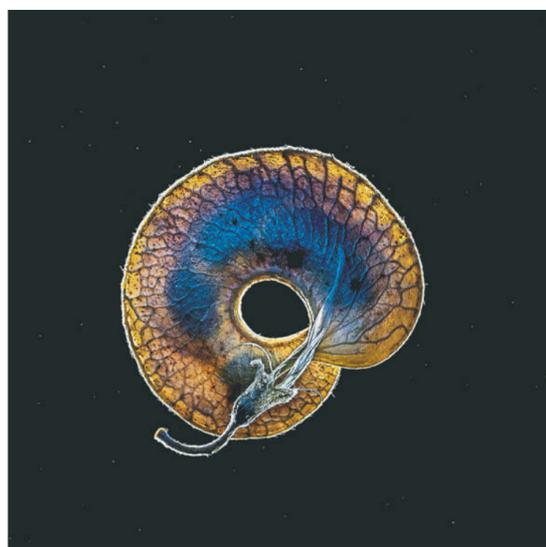


Your Move
GRETCHEN REYNOLDS

Are you an active couch potato? Take this two-question quiz to find out:

Did you work out for 30 minutes today? Did you spend the rest of the day staring at your computer and then settle in front of the television at night?

If you answered yes to both questions, then you meet the definition of what scientists call “an active couch potato.” It means that, despite your commitment to exercise, you could be at risk for a variety of health problems, SEE YOUR MOVE ON E5



PROJECT GROWS INTO LOVE STORY ABOUT SEEDS

Photographer Thierry Ardouin says their beauty helped him develop a better appreciation for life

TEXT BY BRONWEN LATIMER
PHOTOGRAPHY BY THIERRY ARDOUIN

Seeds are embryos.

Some are so tiny they ride on the wings of birds to distant places undetected. Others drop noisily to the ground, with infinitesimal leaves, stems and roots tucked tightly inside protective layers of nourishing endosperm and a fibrous coat. Some look almost like the mature plants they will grow to become, others just look like little balls.

Seed vaults around the world house thousands of them as carefully as precious gems. At last count, Britain's Millennium Seed Bank held 2.4 billion types of seeds representing almost 40,000 different species.

Photographer Thierry Ardouin did not intend to photograph seeds in 2009; instead, he wanted to create a story about French agriculture, an industry that accounted for 1.6 percent of the French economy in 2021, according to the World Bank.

But as he went about his research, Ardouin discovered a French law that requires farmers to buy seeds from a seed catalogue assembled during World War II. Illegal seeds exist, but they are not considered viable, saleable food. Ardouin asked: If the law divides the seeds into two

categories, does nature? Do they look different?

And so his seed project began. Ardouin met farmers, members of gardening associations, scientists and, eventually, the archivist at the Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle in Paris (Collection MNHN) in his quest to find answers.

After he had collected and studied a range of seeds, he reflected on the larger project. "I thought my job was to show the beauty of the seeds," Ardouin said. "Yes, there is a political aspect to them, but first is the beauty, the fragility, the precious quality they possess."

He photographed many categories of seeds — vegetables, fruits, trees, evergreens and flowers. "There are over 500 different varieties of apples," Ardouin says, "but we see only five or six in the grocery store."

As Ardouin worked closely with the seeds, he began to see their attributes as personalities, their unique qualities as their strength. Seeds, as tiny or invisible as they may be, are life itself.

Ardouin's book, "Histoires de graines" ("Seed Stories"), was published in French and English in June by Tendence Floue with accompanying exhibitions. The photos here are reprinted from his book.



TOP, CLOCKWISE: Moon trefoil, or *Medicago arborea* L. Mgambo black-pearl tree, or *Majideia zanguebarica*. Coco-de-Mer (the largest seed), or *Lodoicea maldivica*. Golden hogweed flower, or *Malabaila aurea*. Water caltrop, or *Trapa natans* (variety *bicornis*). Starflower, or *Lomelosia stellata*. Beetroot, or *Beta vulgaris* L.

'Vampire' grave shows 17th-century fear of women who 'didn't fit in'

BY ADELA SULIMAN

A sharp sickle was placed across her neck, ready to decapitate her should she jolt awake after death, and a padlock was put around her big toe.

That's what scientists found when they excavated the corpse of a woman they believe was suspected of being a vampire in 17th-century Poland.

The unnamed woman — thought to be young and of a high social class, given that she was buried in a silk scarf — was probably accused of being supernatural because she stood out, experts said. A large protruding tooth may provide some clues.

A professor from Poland's Nicolaus Copernicus University in Torun said burials involving a sickle are extremely unusual. Archaeologists from the university made the discovery in the southern village of Pien in the Eastern European nation last month and recently published their findings.

"Ways to protect against the return of the dead include cutting off the head or legs, placing the deceased face down to bite into the ground, burning them and smashing them with a stone," Dariusz Polinski, who led the research team, told The Washington Post. Instead, in this case, a sharp scythe is "not laid flat but placed on the neck in such a way that if the deceased had tried to get up, most likely the head would have been cut off or injured."



The remains of a female "vampire" with a sickle across her throat were recently unearthed at an archaeological site in Poland.

The woman's exhumed remains are now being studied by Polinski's team.

Her burial reveals "paranoia" and "fear" around vampires — and the "gender politics" at the time, Stacey Abbott, author of "Undead Apocalypse: Vampires and Zombies in the 21st Century," said.

Charges of being vampires were often made against people who "didn't fit in," Abbott said. "Anxiety about vampires came from people being different," as was often the case in witchcraft accusations, she added.

The woman may have been singled out for her gender, a physical deformity or any social anomaly considered "immoral,"

Abbott said, as people sought "a supernatural explanation" for those they perceived as outcasts.

It is not unusual for "vampiric graves" to be found on roadsides or crossroads, said Bethan Briggs-Miller, a British folklorist and paranormal historian. This is because the deceased were not permitted to be buried close to others or in consecrated ground and cemeteries. The suspected individuals would often be buried with chains or multiple stakes driven through their bodies. Others found in such graves may have died by suicide.

The fear was that they could "have wandered the Earth and risen from the grave," she said. Women were "very suscepti-

ble" to retaliation for any kind of accusation or anomaly — from refusing to marry, having a miscarriage or even not menstruating, said Briggs-Miller, co-host of the "Eerie Essex" podcast. That her clothes indicate a high social status proves that such accusations of vampirism "affected women from all stations," she said. It was "all part of this demonizing of women that took place for a long time."

"If you stood out in any way, similar to the witch trials, to be slightly different created the same sort of hysteria," she continued. "It would have been a case of accuse first, otherwise you'd be accused yourself."

Despite the 17th-century medical community's relative lack of scientific knowledge about communicable diseases or mental health, the burials were performed with a great degree of "pragmatism" to prevent the dead from rising from the grave, Abbott said. "Coming back as a vampire was a fate worse than death."

Accusations of vampirism were common across Europe at the time, especially in what are now Serbia, Romania, Greece and Italy, she said. The church and other authorities were "systematic" in investigating and exhuming bodies and hunting for evidence of vampirism, which could include a lack of decomposition, red cheeks, blood in the mouth or swollen corpses.

"In some respects, these were very superstitious beliefs," but

the investigative methods "were very scientific," Abbott said.

The myth of vampires has evolved over the centuries; some historians trace their origins back to biblical references to Lilith, an apparently demonic wife of Adam who preyed on the weak and young.

Others cite the ancient Greek myth of Lamia, a blood-lusting daemon who also fed off children.

The stories are common across the world, sliding on a scale between zombies and transformative bats, but they generally have some elements in common, experts say, such as an association with blood, feasting on the living and being contagious.

Vampires have long fascinated the modern imagination, from Bram Stoker's "Dracula" to the television hit "Buffy the Vampire Slayer," the "Twilight" romance novels and movies, and the popular children's animation "Hotel Transylvania."

"We are naturally drawn to dark stories," Briggs-Miller told The Post, explaining the centuries-old interest in vampires.

For Abbott, our fascination has transformed over time. "As we shift and change and our fears change, vampires often come to embody different things," she said.

Originally linked to religion and fear, they are now given a "more sympathetic" treatment representing "groups that have been oppressed," and we wish them happy endings rather than

death. "We like them," she added.

They also allow the living to ponder the "perennial question" of life after death, said Abbott, stoking a morbid curiosity that continues to draw in readers, historians and the public — not just on Halloween.

But European historian and professor Martyn Rady told The Post that "there is nothing at all odd in this discovery." The use of a sickle across the neck was "pretty tame," he added.

"This is not a vampire, but a revenant. All cultures have a belief in the 'undead,'" he explained, describing them generally as "people that have led violent lives or died violently or have not been buried with the proper funeral rites."

In some parts of Europe, "bodies may be cut in two down the middle, or the head sliced off, or a stake driven through the corpse to pin it down," he continued. "In Chinese accounts, one way to keep the corpse immobile is to bury it with rice, since the undead like nothing better than to count rice grains," he said.

Similar accounts have been found in Europe, with seeds being sprinkled inside graves for suspected vampires to count until the sun comes up.

"There is, incidentally, nothing odd in the revenant being a woman," Rady said of the Polish case. "Quite why the locals feared the woman might become undead is unknown: possibly, something as simple as dying violently by falling off a cart."