

Love rats in cheap trousers win prize for weird science

Written by Administrator

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Tom Whipple, Science Editor - September 23 2016, 12:01 am, The Times

When an Egyptian fertility researcher dressed 75 rats in rodent-sized trousers to see how it affected their sex lives, two things were guaranteed. First, Ahmed Shafik's paper would have the cutest diagrams ever published in the journal *European Urology*. Second, he would win an Ig Nobel award.

His discovery that rats which had previously worn polyester trousers were less sexually successful last night earned him the Ig Nobel Prize in Reproduction.

The annual awards, which reward research that "First makes you laugh, then makes you think", also honoured a team for their psychology paper "From Junior to Senior Pinocchio: A Cross-Sectional Lifespan Investigation of Deception". According to their citation, read out at the 26th annual ceremony at Harvard, they were chosen for "asking a thousand liars how often they lie, and for deciding whether to believe those answers".

Since their launch in 1990, the Ig Nobels have become a fixture of the scientific calendar. Their goal is not to find bad research but instead to find good-quality studies that are also amusing. Most scientists consider them to be an honour, although they are not just about prestige — there is a cash prize of a Zimbabwean ten trillion dollar bill.

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Past winners include Sir Andre Geim for “magnetic levitation of a frog”. Sir Andre, the co-discoverer of graphene, remains the only person to win both a Nobel and an Ig Nobel Prize.

Notable winners this year included Japanese researchers “for investigating whether things look different when you bend over and view them between your legs”, and a team from Britain and New Zealand which won the economics prize for “assessing the perceived personalities of rocks from a sales and marketing perspective”. The literature prize went to Fredrik Sjöberg from Sweden for “his three–volume autobiographical work about the pleasures of collecting flies that are dead, and flies that are not yet dead”.

The winner of the chemistry prize had been widely predicted. It went to Volkswagen for “solving the problem of excessive automobile pollution emissions by automatically electromechanically producing fewer emissions whenever the cars are being tested.”