



Ig Nobel Prize 2024 winners: Pigeon-guided missiles and butt-breathing mammals

Celebrating the weird and wonderful side of science, the Ig Nobel Prizes have been announced for 2024.

Credit: Alamy / Associated Press

By [Alex Hughes](#)

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The Nobel Prize is quite understandably considered the greatest accomplishment many can achieve. It has been granted to some of science's greatest minds including Marie Curie, Alexander Fleming and Frederick Sanger. However, there is arguably one award that is more important.

Marc Abrahams, editor of satirical magazine *Annals of Improbable Research*, set out to celebrate the Nobel Prize with his very own version of the award.

Started in 1991, the Ig Nobel Prize also awards great minds of science... just the slightly less serious ones.

Put simply, it's a way to award the sillier side of science. Prizes have been gifted for research into why scientists like to lick rocks, evolutionary theories into why beards were developed to avoid being punched, and detailed plans into how to best transport a rhino.

The 2024 awards have now been given out, highlighting some of the weirdest scientific findings happening right now. We've picked out our favourites.



Who are the 2024 Ig Nobel Prize winners?

Physiology Prize

Won by a combination of Japanese and American researchers, the Physiology Ig Nobel Prize solved a crucial question: [can mammals breathe out of their anuses?](#) Turns out they can. Who would have thought?

Peace Prize

The Ig Nobel Peace Prize was awarded *in memoriam* to the late Prof BF Skinner for his experiments on live pigeons. In the paper titled '[Pigeons in a Pelican](#)', he tested to see the feasibility of housing the birds inside missiles to guide the missile flight paths.

"This is the history of a crackpot idea, born on the wrong side of the tracks intellectually speaking, but

eventually vindicated in a sort of middle-class respectability”, said Skinner.

Botany Prize

Jacob White from the US and [Felipe Yamashita](#) in Germany won the Botany Prize this year. It was awarded for their paper revealing that the South American plant *Boquila trifoliolata* [can mimic the leaves of plastic plants](#) it is placed alongside.

Medicine Prize

Won by a combined effort from Swiss, Belgian and German researchers, the award was given for demonstrating that fake medicine that causes painful side-effects can be [more effective in patients than fake medicine with no side effects](#).

Physics Prize

It's not all fun and games: [Dr James Liao](#) from the University of Florida won the Physics Award for his investigation into the [swimming abilities of a dead trout](#).

Probability Prize

A mostly Dutch team of 50 researchers set out with a simple idea. They flipped 350,757 coins to test the theories of Persi Diaconis, a former magician and professor of statistics at Stanford University.

Their research supported his theory, showing that [coin tosses are more likely to land the same way up](#) as they started, but only by a small margin.

Chemistry Prize

The Chemistry Award was given for a rather simple but bizarre study. A team from the Netherlands used chromatography to [separate drunk and sober worms](#). Why..? It's not entirely clear.

Biology Prize

A posthumous award was given to the late Fordyce Ely and William Peterson. In 1940, they investigated factors affecting the production of milk in dairy herds, writing their results in the Journal of Animal Science.

They placed a cat on the back of a cow, repeatedly exploding paper bags next to it to see if the milk-flow changed. [The cows that were scared ended up producing less milk.](#)

Credit: Associated Press / Alamy

What are the Ig Nobel Prizes?

The Ig Nobel Prize is an event that started back in 1991. While it focuses on the funnier side of science, the event is taken very seriously. Awards are given out by Nobel Prize winners and the event is hosted at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).

There are ten awards up for grabs each year ranging across a range of scientific disciplines. While there are plenty of winners each year, just one person, [Prof Sir Andre Geim](#), who both worked out how to levitate frogs and was the first person to isolate graphene, has won both an IG Nobel Prize and an actual Nobel Prize. We'll let you work out which prize was for which breakthrough.

Along with the prize itself, every winner is also gifted 100 trillion dollars. Unsurprisingly, this would be impossible with the American dollar, which is why the award is gifted in the Zimbabwean currency with an equivalent value of \$0.40.

Who won awards last year?

- **Chemistry and Geology: Jan Zalasiewicz** for explaining why many scientists like to lick rocks.
- **Nutrition: Homei Miyashita and Hiromi Nakamura** for experiments to determine how electrified chopsticks can change the taste of food.
- **Medicine: Christine Pham, Bobak Hedayati**, for using cadavers to work out if there are an equal number of nose hairs in each nostril.
- **Mechanical Engineering: Te Faye Yap, Zhen Liu, Anoop Rajappan** for re-animating dead spiders to use as mechanical gripping tools.
- **Public health: Seung-min Park** for the Stanford Toilet, a device that uses a variety of tricks to analyse the substances that humans excrete.
- **Physics: Bieito Fernandez Castro, Marian Pena, Enrique Nogueria** for measuring the extent to which ocean-water mixing is affected by the sexual activity of anchovy fish.
- **Education: Katy Tam, Cyanea Poon, Victoria Hui, Christy Wong, Vivian Kwong** for carefully studying the boredom of teachers and students.
- **Psychology: Stanley Milgram, Leonard Bickman and Lawrence**

Berkowitz for experiments on a city street to see how many stop to look upward when they see strangers looking upward.

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Alex is a staff writer at BBC Science Focus. He has worked for a number of brands covering technology and science with an interest in consumer tech, robotics, AI and the often generally wonderful and weird world of future technology.



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