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No Kidding

An occasional look at research results that didn't surprise us

By Heidi Landecker and Don Troop

SNOWING THE SKIERS: Forget those skiing Web sites that aggregate snow conditions; turn on your iPhones instead. A team of economists at Dartmouth College has discovered that ski areas report 23 percent more new snow on weekends, but, unsurprisingly, "there is no such weekend effect in government precipitation data." The lead researchers, Eric Zitzewitz and Jonathan Zinman, surmised that ski resorts with difficult terrain and near cities would benefit most from weekend skiers, so that was where reports were likely to be exaggerated the most. That is what they found, until near the end of their study, when a new iPhone application made it easier for skiers to comment on snow conditions in real time. "Exaggeration falls sharply," the economists report, "and much more at resorts with better iPhone reception." The preliminary name of the study? "Snowed: Deceptive Advertising at Ski Resorts."

MMM ... CHEAP BEER: When drinks are cheap, patrons tend to consume more of them, according to a survey of 804 patrons exiting seven bars adjacent to a large university in the Southeast. But as prices rise, patrons still drink—just not as much. Researchers at San Diego State University's Center for Alcohol and Drug Studies will publish their findings in the November issue of *Alcoholism: Clinical & Experimental Research*.



WHAT DID I DO WITH THAT CHEAP BEER? No matter how much the drinks cost, consuming too many of them causes one's mind to wander, researchers have concluded. Further, say

psychology professors at the University of Pittsburgh and the University of California at Santa Barbara, alcohol makes it less likely that the drinker will even notice that his or her mind has wandered. Participants in the study—half of whom had consumed alcohol and the other half a placebo—were instructed to signal if they zoned out while reading *War and Peace*, by Tolstoy (*above*). The paper, "Lost in the Sauce: The Effects of Alcohol on Mind Wandering," appeared in *Psychological Science*.

AROUSING RESEARCH: Scientists using magnetic-resonance imaging to stimulate the brains of "early risers" and "night owls" in a study at the University of Alberta found that morning people were most excitable at 9 a.m.—the exact opposite of evening people, whose brains were most excitable at 9 p.m.

THE TRUTH ABOUT CATS ... Cats are able to control their humans by emitting a high-pitched "solicitation" cry—embedded in a purr—that is so annoying it can't be ignored, a team of psychologists at the University of Sussex found. But not all cats use the solicitation purr, said the study's lead author, Karen McComb, who is often awakened by her own cat, Pepo. "It seems to most often develop in cats that have a one-on-one with their owners rather than in large households where there is a lot going on and such purring might get overlooked," she said. "Meowing seems to be more common in these situations." The solicitation and regular purrs can be heard online at <http://www.lifesci.sussex.ac.uk/cmvc>

[/Domestic%20cats.html](#).

... AND DOGS: A dog's bark, on the other hand, is an all-purpose auditory signal, according to a paper in the journal *Behavioural Processes*. "The domestic dog does not have an intentional message in mind, such as, 'I want to play' or 'The house is on fire,'" said the lead author, Kathryn Lord, a doctoral candidate in organismic and evolutionary biology at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. Not all dog noises, however, are barks, she said, and those other noises might have other meanings.

... AND THEIR OWNERS: Fat British children are alarmingly clever, seemed to be the lesson of a study carried out this summer by the Mile End Centre for Sports and Exercise Medicine, in East

London. Kids who are 11 or 12 years old should take a minimum number of steps each day to remain fit—about 12,000 a day for girls and 15,000 a day for boys—so researchers equipped a group of obese children with pedometers to calculate their apparent shortfall. "After a week we found there were some kids who were extremely active but still obese," said Nicola Maffulli, a professor of trauma and orthopedic surgery at the Keele University School of Medicine. What Dr. Maffulli and his colleagues eventually learned was that some of the children were attaching the pedometers to the their dogs' collars and letting them run. After the dogs were given a rest, the researchers confirmed their suspicions: The girls were averaging only 10,150 steps a day, and the boys 12,620.

'DAMNED KIDS': We don't know if Dr. Maffulli swore upon learning that he had been tricked, but if he had he might have felt better. Sixty-four undergraduates at Keele University were told to plunge a hand into a bucket of ice water for as long as they could stand it. While doing so they could utter either their favorite swear word or a neutral term. Researchers reported in the journal *NeuroReport* that when the students swore, they were able to keep their hands submerged for longer periods than when they kept it G-rated.

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