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Pigeons Threaten Venice



A vendor selling tourists pigeon feed in St. Mark's Square in Venice.

Throwing rice at newlyweds and feeding the pigeons of St. Mark's Square with bird seed will become illegal under new laws designed to rid Venice of its "unbearable" flocks.

Massimo Cacciari, the mayor, said that while throwing rice at weddings was a longstanding Italian tradition to wish newly married couples fertility and happiness, it also had the unfortunate side-effect of feeding pigeons.

These pests were a threat to human health and were destroying the city's Renaissance and Baroque architecture, he said, according to Timesonline.co.uk.

The mayor was supported by Marco Agostini, the chief of police, who said: "Throwing rice at the bride and groom brings hordes of pigeons that then wait around until the next ceremony. The situation has become unbearable."

An estimated 120,000 pigeons nest in colonies in Venice's palazzos and churches, twice the resident human population. Feeding pigeons on St. Mark's Square has long been a tourist attraction. However, Venice officials say that the pigeons are damaging buildings with their corrosive droppings and are attacking the marble and stucco facades with their beaks, including the ornate St Mark's Basilica and the Doge's Palace.

Renata Codello, Superintendent of Architectural and Cultural Heritage in Venice, said that the pigeons pecked at the facades to get at scraps of food and bird seed blown inside by the breeze. The authorities had tried lacing bird seed with contraceptive chemicals, to no apparent effect.

A recent city council report said pigeons were attacking the facades "like kamikaze pilots" in scenes resembling Alfred Hitchcock's horror film *The Birds*.

The council banned residents from leaving grain or bread out for pigeons ten years ago, while still allowing 18 licensed street vendors to sell bird seed on St. Mark's Square.

He said that a decree banning bird seed sales and rice throwing at Palazzo Cavalli, the register office, would take effect in the next few days.

The population of pigeons is said to have grown by 24 percent in the last year, BBC said. It is a costly problem for the city council. Each year, they spend \$14,000 (£7,000) per pigeon clearing statues and public areas of the excrement.



Languages at Risk, Traditions Dying

Languages that embody the history and traditions of people are dying, from rural Australia to Siberia to the southwestern US state of Oklahoma, researchers said. While there are an estimated 7,000 languages spoken around the world today, one of them dies out about every two weeks, according to linguistic experts struggling to save at least some of them, AP reported.

Five hotspots where languages are most endangered were listed in a briefing by the Living Tongues Institute for Endangered Languages and the National Geographic Society. In addition to northern Australia, eastern Siberia and Oklahoma and the US southwest, many native languages are endangered in South America—Ecuador, Colombia, Peru, Brazil and Bolivia—as well as the area including British Columbia, and the states of Washington and Oregon.

Losing languages means losing knowledge, says K. David Harrison, an assistant professor of

linguistics at Swarthmore College.

"When we lose a language, we lose centuries of human thinking about time, seasons, sea creatures, reindeer, edible flowers, mathematics, landscapes, myths, music, the unknown and the everyday." As many as half of the current languages have never been written down, he estimated.

That means, if the last speaker of many of these vanished tomorrow, the language would be lost because there is no dictionary, no literature, no text of any kind, he said.

Harrison is associate director of the Living Tongues Institute based. He and institute director Gregory D.S. Anderson analyzed the top regions for disappearing languages.

Anderson said languages become endangered when a community decides that its language is an impediment. The children may be first to do this, he explained, realizing that other more widely spoken languages are more useful.

The key to getting a language revitalized, he said, is getting a new generation of speakers. He said the institute worked with local communities and tries to help by developing teaching materials and by recording the endangered language. Harrison said that the 83 most widely spoken languages account for about 80 percent of the world's population while the 3,500 smallest languages account for just 0.2 percent of the world's people. Languages are more endangered than plant and animal species, he said.

The hot spots listed as:

Northern Australia, 153 languages, The researchers said aboriginal Australia holds some of the world's most endangered languages, in part because aboriginal groups splintered during conflicts with white settlers.

Central South America including Ecuador, Colombia, Peru, Brazil and Bolivia--113 languages. The area has extremely high diversity, very little documentation and several immediate threats.

Northwest Pacific Plateau, including British Columbia in Canada and the states of Washington and Oregon in the US, 54 languages. Every language in the American part of this hotspot is endangered or moribund, meaning the youngest speaker is over age 60.

Eastern Siberian Russia, China, Japan--23 languages. Government policies in the region have forced speakers of minority languages to use the national and regional languages and, as a result, some have only a few elderly speakers.

Oklahoma, Texas and New Mexico--40 languages. Oklahoma has one of the highest densities of indigenous languages in the United States. A moribund language of the area is Yuchi, which may be unrelated to any other language in the world. As of 2005, only five elderly members of the Yuchi tribe were fluent.



40,000 Monuments Listed in Bulgaria

Thracian Tomb Unearthed

Bulgaria had some 40,000 monuments of culture on its territory, Georgi Ugrinov, head of the National Institute for Monuments of Culture said.

The number included residential and administrative buildings, archeological sites, monasteries and churches, among others, Sofiaecho.com reported.

According to Ugrinov, the exact figure varies, because the list of monuments is under constant actualization.

In some cases buildings, which do qualify to become monuments of culture, had been announced as such, and the institute has to exclude them from the list.

In Sofia alone there were nearly 6000 such buildings. Bulgaria has an abundance of monuments of culture, Ugrinov said. As an example, India also had 40,000 monuments of culture, but the country is incomparably bigger and with a rich culture too, he said.

Unlike other countries, where cultural monument's preservation is state priority, Bulgarian authorities lacked a clear will to preserve cultural heritage.

According to a Sofia News Agency report, Bulgarian archeologists have recently unearthed an ancient Thracian tomb during excavations near the village of Cherniche.

The team of Georgi Nehrizov, a specialist in Thracian history and culture with the Bulgarian Archeology Institute, stumbled accidentally on the tomb.

The two meters long, 1.8 meters wide and two meters high sepulcher is dated back to the 4-3 century BC, and it is completely intact, along with the two-slope surface of the walls.

The report said the antechamber was, however, destroyed by treasure hunters, who had probably tried to penetrate the tomb with a digger.

Specialists from the Archeology Institute have now started arriving at the spot to make further research and discuss how to best preserve the finding.



Albert Einstein (German theoretical physicist,1879-1955): I am enough of an artist to draw freely upon my imagination. Imagination is more important than knowledge. Knowledge is limited. Imagination encircles the world.



picture



Takht-e Jamshid (Persepolis) in Iran's Fars province



Neanderthals Had Good Oral Hygiene

Two molar teeth of around 63,400 years old show that Neanderthal predecessors of humans may have been dental hygiene fans.

The teeth have "grooves formed by the passage of a pointed object, which confirms the use of a small stick for cleaning the mouth," Paleontology Professor Juan Luis Asuarga told reporters, presenting an archeological find in Madrid.

According to Reuters, the fossils, unearthed in Pinilla del Valle, are the first human examples found in the Madrid region in 25 years, the regional government's culture department said.

Neanderthals were predecessors of modern humans who inhabited much of Europe, North Africa and parts of Asia from about 125,000 to 30,000 years ago.

"There are two (teeth), perfectly preserved, in which the wear and tear of a human of about 30 years old is perceptible," a government statement said. Experts also found diverse animal fossils, including remains of hyenas, bears, deer and rhinoceroses.



Two molar teeth belonging to a Neanderthal from around 63,400 years ago.



Peru Counts Quake Loss

Historic churches and colonial-era haciendas along Peru's southern coast suffered serious damage in last month's deadly earthquake.

The quake badly damaged at least 173 churches, monuments and historic buildings, with about one-third completely destroyed, said the director of the state-run National Culture Institute, Cecilia Bakula, Canadianpress reported.

The 329-year-old colonial Hacienda San Jose, outside the city of Chincha, suffered partially collapsed walls but was largely intact, saved by its wooden roof. The hacienda was declared a national monument in the late 1960s.

Most buildings were built with unreinforced adobe in Pisco, where 85 percent of the buildings were destroyed.

Karina Moreno, Bakula's spokeswoman, said there have not been any reports of serious damage to pre-Columbian sites as of yet. Officials are taking inventory of some 2,800 pre-Inca monuments there, where burial sites are particularly vulnerable because of the loose desert soil.

The Nazca lines, world-famous desert geoglyphs, suffered no damage, government officials said. (Geoglyphs are large images made on the ground using arrangements of stones or soil.)

Boat trips to an offshore wildlife reserve nearby have begun operating again, after sitting idle at port for three weeks. The launches ferry sightseers to the rugged, guano-coated Ballestas Islands--home to sea lions and myriad bird species, including Humboldt penguins, 265 kilometers southeast of the capital.

The government agency that oversees the adjacent Paracas National Reserve, says it is still unsafe to visit after the quake shook chipped rocks off coastal bluffs. Most of the arched rock formation in the reserve, known as "the Cathedral," came tumbling down.



Beijing, China's Most Beautiful City

Dirty, polluted, congested and razed of many old buildings--but Beijing has still been chosen as China's most beautiful city.

The host to next year's Summer Olympics beat 558 mainland cities as well as former British colony Hong Kong, which came in second in the survey by the China Institute of City Competitiveness, a non-profit organization.

Southern boomtown Shenzhen came third for "its role as the pioneer of China's opening up and reform

policies", while glitzy Shanghai got fourth place "for being the country's financial centre", the official China Daily reported.
Institute chairman Gui Qiangfang said the assessment took into consideration Beijing's design, infrastructure, architecture, culture and natural beauty.
"Factors including the preservation of historical monuments, forest coverage, air quality, the transportation network, city life, public space and GDP were also considered," the newspaper said, with no hint of irony.



Ethiopian City to Become Tourist Hub

For 1,000 years, this city on a hilltop has been a centre of Islamic faith in the Horn of Africa, with a forbidding, four-meter wall surrounding ancient mosques and serpentine alleyways.

Now, Harar leaders are hoping it can become a centre of tourism as well. "The future of Harar is tourist attraction," said regional president Murad Abdulhadi.

Harar was named a UNESCO World Heritage site last year, joining some of the world's top landmarks such as the Grand Canyon in the United States, the Great Wall of China and the Acropolis in Greece, AP reported.

It is also the fourth holiest city in Islam--behind Mecca, Medina and Beit-ul Moqaddas. And some consider Harar the birthplace of coffee. Its aroma wafts through the cool air of the Ethiopian highlands.

Some of Harar's attractions defy easy explanation, such as the old man who hand-feeds some 50 hyenas every night, treating them like obedient kittens.

But the city, which lies some 400 kilometers from the capital, Addis Ababa, lacks modern amenities and suffers from a chronic water shortage. With only a handful of hotels and the nearest airport more than an hour's drive away, moving Harar into the future is an ambitious plan.



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