

8-legged boogeyman isn't that scary

By Rick Vetter

About a decade ago, a pest control manager emailed me saying he had a big problem. At six military facilities he oversaw, strange wounds were popping up on people's skin. The facilities' doctors diagnosed them as spider bites. But the manager had searched the barracks, and couldn't find any spiders.

I'm an arachnologist, and my specialty is the brown recluse spider—a creature that hides in cracks and crevices. So I told him: Forget the spiders, and have the doctors check those afflicted for a bacterial infection instead. It turned out they had methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (commonly known as "MRSA").

People are terrified of brown recluse spiders when they shouldn't be. In the almost 25 years I've been studying the creatures, the recluse, whose scientific name is *Loxosceles reclusa*, is a medium-sized spider, about three-eighths of an inch in body length, found throughout the central American Midwest, between Nebraska, Ohio, Georgia, and Texas. It is not impossible, but still very rare, to find them elsewhere.

But harmless brown spiders are frequently misidentified as brown recluses around the country.

In the regions of America where brown recluse spiders do exist, people have every right to be cautious. Brown recluse bites can cause significant damage to skin. If the venom causes a reaction throughout the body, a bite can be fatal, especially in small children. But these are extreme cases. Only about 10 percent of bites have moderate effects on their victims. Fewer than one in 100 becomes systemic.

I've known Midwesterners who successfully raised kids in recluse-infested homes without incident. One family in Kansas collected more than 2,000 brown recluse spiders in their 19th century house in six months, yet lived there for 11 years before someone received a bite. The wound only caused a finger to turn red and swell a little.

So why do so many people break into a sweat at the thought of the coin-sized creature when they're far more likely to get killed by a bolt of lightning? Undoubtedly there's an element of fear of the unknown—the monster that could be hidden in any hole or crevice. And then there's the media. In the news, only extremely nasty bites are ever reported—and typically they aren't even actual bites.

Physicians have contributed to the misperception too. Misdiagnosis of skin lesions as brown recluse bites has been a chronic, widespread problem in North America since 1957, when the first article was published definitively proving that brown recluses cause them.

The myth of the brown recluse's ubiquity poses a real danger. Unlike most recluse bites, some conditions with similar symptoms are fatal—or, result in permanent damage. Conditions that are confused with recluse bites include Lyme disease, leukemia, bacterial infections like MRSA, diabetic ulcers, and cancer. When a lesion is misdiagnosed as a recluse bite, it allows a person's actual condition to continue unrestricted.

Thankfully, after decades of crusading for better awareness of just how rare brown recluses are found outside of the central Midwest, I'm finally starting to see my work have an effect. Now medical guides caution doctors to consider many possibilities before declaring a skin lesion as a bite. While there are still questionable local reports of bites around the country, publications including Wired and Slate have cited my research to help dispel fears of recluses.

Knowing that people are starting to get the message is very satisfying to me. And it should allow you to sleep well at night, too. If you don't live in areas of the country with proven brown recluse spider populations, calm down. If you live in indigenous recluse areas, take precautions to minimize spider bite possibilities, but don't let it consume you.

Now, at least you have one less thing to dread about the world.

Rick Vetter is a retired research associate from the entomology department at UC Riverside. He has been working on brown recluse spider issues for nearly 25 years and has recently published a book, "The Brown Recluse Spider". This essay is part of The Things That Haunt Us, a project of Zócalo Public Square.

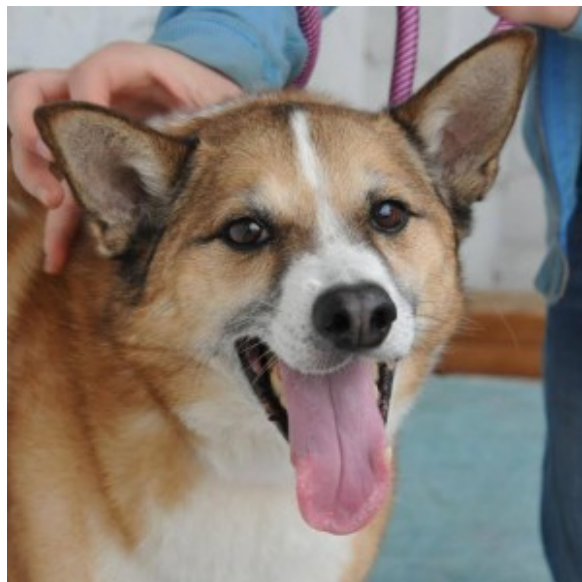
Ski movie captures historic Hahnenkamm race

For 75 years, the annual Hahnenkamm race in Kitzbühel, Austria, has produced unforgettable triumphs and heartrending tragedies, a heritage that is full of myths and legends. Nowhere else is skiing celebrated so intensely. The city, the nation, and the entire winter sports world go crazy for the battles that play out on the slopes, and the race down the Streif is the most anticipated event of all – the Superbowl of skiing.

"Streif – One Hell of a Ride" vividly shares this momentous occasion, plus everything done in preparation. This ski race movie was produced by Planet Watch.

It will be shown at Tahoe Art Haus in Tahoe Cit on Nov. 6 at 6pm, and Nov. 7 at 5 and 7:30pm. Go **online** to purchase tickets.

Tahoe Tails – Adoptable Pets in South Lake Tahoe



Loki

Loki is a 10 year old Shiba Inu mix. He weighs about 35 pounds and would like a home as an only dog or with a mellow female dog and no children under 12.

Loki has just had his teeth cleaned and his blood work shows that he is a healthy boy. Due to our wonderful partnership with Umbrella of Hope we were able to obtain the dental care that he needed.

He would be excellent at keeping cats out of his new yard.

He was surrendered by his owners when they moved.

Loki is neutered, microchipped, heart worm negative, and vaccinated. He is at the El Dorado County Animal Services shelter in Meyers, along with many other dogs and cats who are waiting for their new homes. Go to the Tahoe animal shelter's Facebook page to see photos and descriptions of all pets at the shelter.

Call 530.573.7925 for directions, hours, and other information on adopting a pet. For spay-neuter assistance for South Tahoe residents, go **online**.

– Karen Kuentz

Barton doc outlines breast cancer facts

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – Even without a family history or other factors, nearly 13 of out every 100 women will get breast cancer. While family history is the No. 1 risk factor, 85 percent of breast cancer cases involve people with no family history.

The good news is the number of people diagnosed with breast cancer and those dying from it are declining. In large part this has to do with better screenings, improved surgical options, as well as advanced radiation and chemotherapy treatments.

Still, the American Cancer Society predicts there will be 231,840 new breast cancer cases this year and 40,000 deaths because of the disease.

These are stats that Amanda Weavil shared with Soroptimist

International of South Lake Tahoe last week as part of what was Breast Cancer Awareness Month. Weavil is an obgyn with Barton Health.

Women between 50 and 55 are most at risk, while more white women are diagnosed with the disease. However, more black women die from breast cancer, Weavil said.

Modified risks – things women may have some control over – include:

- Breast feeding – decreased risk
- More than two alcoholic beverages a day – increased risk
- Obesity – increased risk
- Physically active – decreased risk
- Oral contraceptive for more than five years – increased risk
- Menopause after 55 – increased risk
- Menstruation before 12 – increased risk
- Never having kids – increased risk
- Smoker – increased risk
- Abortion – no bearing
- Antiperspirants – no bearing.

Tomosynthesis is the newest technology for testing for breast cancer. It's a type of mammogram. Barton will have the technology after the first of the year. The machine is being paid for by the Barton Auxiliary.

Barton Women's Health, who Weavil works for, will be bringing on a third obgyn this month.

While the American Cancer Society came out with new recommendations in October when it comes to what age to begin breast screens (age 45), when to stop having them annually (55) and said self-exams are not worthy, Weavil said not all medical organizations are in agreement. The American College of Surgeons and American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology are expected to issue their guidelines after the first of the year.

For Weavil, she is sticking with the old regulations until the other two organizations weigh in. That includes the first mammogram at 40 and monthly self-exams.

Restricting sugar, not calories, improves youths' health

By Victoria Colliver, San Francisco Chronicle

The health of obese kids can rapidly and dramatically improve just by taking sugar out of their diet for less than 10 days, a new study by researchers at UC San Francisco and Touro University in Vallejo has found.

The researchers put 43 children and teenagers on a nine-day diet that severely restricted sugar without reducing calories, and virtually every measure of metabolic health – blood pressure, cholesterol and glucose levels – improved even though the participants didn't lose weight.

"What this is saying is that sugar is toxic because it's sugar; not because it's calories," said Robert Lustig,

pediatric endocrinologist at UCSF Benioff Children's Hospital San Francisco and lead author of the study. "This proves conclusively, beyond a shadow of doubt, that a calorie is not a calorie."

Read the whole story

Are Americans selfish or selfless when it comes to gift-giving?

By Herb Scribner, Deseret News

Americans are planning to spend their holiday bonuses on two things this year – family and themselves.

The National Retail Federation's latest consumer survey found that American holiday shoppers plan on spending about \$462.95 on family members this year, which is up from the \$458.75 they spent last year.

And Americans plan on spending a lot on themselves. The survey found that 55.8 percent of shoppers will spend an average of \$131.59 on themselves – up from \$126.37 in 2014, the NRF reported.

In fact, holiday shoppers plan to buy both themselves and their family members nongift items, too, the NRF reported.

Read the whole story

Nature becomes classroom for ZCES students

By Jenay Aiksnoras

More than 180 Zephyr Cove Elementary students stepped outside the classroom and into nature to learn more about Lake Tahoe.

During the field trips students participated in hands-on activities that taught them about a variety of topics including native and invasive animals, the food web, water cycle, photosynthesis, and how to protect Lake Tahoe.

“I liked how we learned about food chains, bugs, and water. Once you learn about science you can start your own experiments,” said Colin Pilcher, a second-grade student.

The field trips are part of a greater effort by the South Tahoe Environmental Education Coalition to educate local students in the Tahoe basin. STEEC is made up of local organizations and agencies aimed at inspiring the next generation of community leaders and scientists. Participating agencies include the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, United States Forest Service Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit, Tahoe Institute for Natural Sciences, and Lake Tahoe Humane Society.

Zephyr Cove Elementary has begun to focus on **place-based learning** with a goal of teaching students about their home environment.

During their field trips the students visited the shores of Zephyr Cove. The primary grades studied water molecules, lake food chains and insects. The students were enthusiastic and engaged in learning about the environment. Third- and fourth-

graders participated in bird watching and learned about invasive species and adaptations.

“It was fun, we got to play games and saw a duck with its little babies,” said fourth-grader Armani Nweke.

In fifth grade, the students learned about how animal waste can pollute the lake. They also spent time looking at “crawdads” or crayfish.

Anna Silverman said, “We had to make different gases like H₂O and we learned about molecular bonds.”

Jenay Aiksnoras is a counselor at Zephyr Cove Elementary School.

Maritime museum set to move to Tahoe City

Tahoe Maritime Museum closed escrow this month on the Tahoe Tree Company property located at the corner of West Lake Boulevard and Granlibakken Road in Tahoe City. The Log Lodge and the adjoining 10-acre property will be the future home of the Tahoe Maritime Museum campus.

Contractors have started making minor modifications to the Log Lodge to prepare the building for the museum’s relocation this fall. The plan is to move the museum offices in the coming month and set up a temporary exhibit for the winter in the main gallery space.

The exhibit will showcase the diverse range of the museum’s collection. The new building and exhibit will be open to the public by Thanksgiving. The current exhibition, Racing Tahoe,

installed in the Homewood building, will be available to the public for viewing on the weekends through April 1.

‘Code Black’ reveals realities of hospital’s ER

The movie “Code Black” is a behind the scenes look at the day-to-day activities of Los Angeles County’s Emergency Department.

Three of Barton Memorial Hospital’s emergency physicians attended residency at LA County and will provide an insider’s perspective of LA County and Barton hospitals after a free screening of the movie.

“Code Black” will be shown Nov. 7 at 6pm in the board room at Lake Tahoe Community College in South Lake Tahoe. It features some graphic medical scenes, so parent discretion is advised.

Car infotainment systems distract even with voice commands

By Dee-Ann Durbin, AP

DETROIT – Car infotainment systems that use voice commands may

let drivers keep their hands on the wheel, but they're still highly distracting.

It takes drivers up to 27 seconds to return to full attention after using voice commands to make a hands-free call, turn on the radio or perform other tasks, according to two studies released this month by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety. Traveling at 25 mph, that would equal the length of three football fields.

The studies, done for AAA by the University of Utah, compared various voice-operated systems from 2015 model-year vehicles.

Infotainment systems in the Chevrolet Equinox, Buick Lacrosse and Toyota 4Runner were the least distracting, because they were more intuitive and better at understanding voice commands. Systems in the Ford Taurus, Chevrolet Malibu, Volkswagen Passat, Nissan Altima, Chrysler 200 and Hyundai Sonata performed less well.

The system in the Mazda6 was the most distracting. The researchers found that Mazda's system required multiple steps, had poor voice detection and took longer to complete tasks. To select a radio station, users had to say "frequency" and then the station number.

Practice with the systems didn't necessarily help. The 257 research subjects took the cars home for five days, but the tasks that were difficult on the first day remained difficult a few days later, the researchers found.

The least distracting systems still impaired drivers for at least 15 seconds, the studies said. Older drivers took a longer time to resume full attention than younger ones. Researchers measured the return to full attention by timing participants' response to a flashing light.

Researchers also studied the level of distraction when drivers use mobile phones with voice commands. They found Google Now

was more intuitive – and slightly less distracting – than Apple’s Siri and Microsoft’s Cortana. The phone study had 65 participants.

Joel Cooper, a research assistant professor of psychology at the university and one of the studies’ authors, said voice command systems tend to be rigid, forcing drivers to use very specific commands to do various tasks. Even when drivers use the right commands, the systems don’t always understand them. When the systems don’t work, drivers get distracted trying to diagnose the problem.

“They’re just not good enough,” Cooper told the Associated Press. “They make a promise that they are a safe alternative, but they just don’t always function as promised.”

Mazda said a more advanced system that should minimize distraction is being used in the 2016 Mazda6 and other new models.

“We’re always looking for new ways to make that interface between user and machine smoother and more intuitive,” the company said in a statement.

While these studies focused on hands-free voice command systems, future studies for AAA will try to compare those systems to more traditional infotainment systems that require drivers to use their hands and look down at the dashboard, Cooper said.

AAA said it is sharing its findings with lawmakers and government agencies. It urged drivers to be cautious with voice command systems, even if the car is stopped at an intersection.

“The reality is that mental distractions persist and can affect driver attention even after the light turns green,” said AAA President and CEO Marshall Doney.