

Wandering & Wondering



John Maybury

DREADLOCK

Democrats dread a repeat of their deadlocked conventions in 1952 (three ballots), 1932 (four ballots), 1920 (44 ballots), 1912 (46 ballots), and especially 1924 (103 ballots plus fistfights on the convention floor). To relive these hairy events, read Peter Carlson's account of "The Ballot Brawl of 1924" in the Washington Post (March 4) available online at washingtonpost.com

FARMERS MARKET RETURNS

"Greetings, Marketeers: Just to let y'all know, I am off like a herd of turtles and working through the requisite rigamarole to get the 2008 Season of the Market up and running. We are heading toward opening day on Wednesday, May 7 at Rockaway Beach in Pacifica. If you just can't wait till May, there will be a mini-version of the Coastside Farmers Market on Monday, March 31, at the I.D.E.S.

Hall in Half Moon Bay from 5 to 7 p.m. This mini-market serves as the opening act for an evening with one of my personal heroes, the bold and remarkable Ann Cooper. We are thrilled to present an evening with this renegade chef, change agent, and author of "Lunch Lessons." Ann introduces the film "Two Angry Moms" (screens at 7 p.m.), leads a Q&A after the film, and signs copies of her book. Both the film and Ann are seriously Google-worthy. You'll be inspired. The event is free of charge, but the beets will cost ya." (Erin Tormey, Coastside Farmers Market, Rockaway Beach, Wednesdays, 2:30 - 6:30 p.m.)

SHY FISH

Factory fishing boats using gill nets scoop up the biggest, boldest, and best fish from the oceans, leading to a decline in the numbers and quality of fish worldwide. The fish left behind are smaller, meeker, and weaker. (University of Technology, Sydney, Australia; reported in EarthWeek)

SIDEWALK ASTRONOMER

"To all of you who know and love John Dobson as a dear friend and teacher, this is to tell you that lately John hasn't been well. Last week John had some problems with dizziness and trouble keeping his

balance. He fell, and was taken to the hospital for some tests. They now believe that John had a stroke. He is scheduled to meet with a neurologist to find out more about his condition. He will remain in Los Angeles, where he's been staying, to give him time to heal. They say that John is in good spirits, but that it's been frustrating for him, because it's keeping him from teaching, traveling, and doing his usual energetic work. Write to John c/o The Sidewalk Astronomers, 1946 Vedanta Place, Los Angeles, CA 90068. Please, no telephone calls until he's feeling better." (Jake Sigg, Nature News)

GOT PLANTS?

Plants are the backbone of life on Earth and an essential resource for human well-being. They play a key role in maintaining basic ecosystem functions and are essential for the survival of the world's fish and wildlife. Just think about how our everyday lives depend on plants:

- Food. Everything we eat comes directly or indirectly from plants. Throughout human history, we have used approximately 7,000 different plant species as food.
- Air. Remember when you first learned about the miracle of photosynthesis? Plants produce oxygen as a byproduct of photosynthesis, and thus provide us with life.

Water. We rely on plants to regulate the water cycle. They help distribute and purify the planet's water. They also help move water from the soil to the atmosphere through a process called transpiration.

Habitat. Of course, aside from humans' myriad uses, plants make up the backbone of all habitats. Other species depend on plants as well for their food and shelter needs.

Medicine. One-quarter of all prescription drugs come directly from or are derivatives of plants. Four out of five people around the world today rely on plants for medicine. (Info: plantconservationday.org)

GAS BOYCOTT: NO GO

Snopes and Urban Legend Forum say that gas boycotts are useless, partly because gas is a fungible commodity—if one oil company's product isn't bought in one market, it will simply sell its output to (or through) other outlets. "The only practical way of reducing gasoline prices is through the straightforward means of buying less gasoline, not through a simple and painless scheme of just shifting where we buy it. The inconvenience of driving less is a hardship too many people apparently aren't willing to endure, however," says Snopes. If this invitation to participate in a "Gas

War" against ExxonMobil seems familiar, that's because one version or another has been in constant circulation since 1999. Regrettably, this so-called "different approach" to dealing with rising gasoline prices is no more likely to succeed this year than it was in 2004, 2003, 2002, or any other year the message has made the rounds. Economists say it's unlikely that any form of consumer boycott could have an appreciable effect on gas prices nationally. (Thanks to Melissa Moss and my friends at the Livability Project for passing along this useful debunking of the bogus boycott idea that I floated last week. Sorry, folks, I guess we are all just going to have to tighten our belts and walk more, take transit more, stay home more—and drive less.)

DOLPHIN RESCUE

In New Zealand recently a bottle-nose dolphin was observed communicating with and rescuing two stranded pygmy sperm whales (a mother and her calf) by leading them from shallow waters near a popular beach out into open waters. (EarthWeek)

SWAMI SEZ

"Farming looks mighty easy when your plow is a pencil and you're a thousand miles from a cornfield." (Dwight D. Eisenhower)

SITeseer

- Farm Labor Organizing Committee helps tobacco pickers: floc.com
- Sign up for satellite flyby, just enter your zip code: spaceweatherphone.com
- Classic TV reruns: hulu.com
- Plant a tree, save the earth: arborday.org
- Carb loading: Denny's all-you-can-eat pancakes, \$4.99
- Fair airfares: farecompare.com, farecast.com, airfarewatchdog.com
- Stop the flood of credit card offers: optoutprescreen.com
- How long home components last: nahb.org
- Travel bargains: independenttraveler.com, affordabletravelclub.net
- Compare rental cars: rentalcars.com, carrentals.com
- Free tire recycling: recycleworks.org, smhealth.org

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