

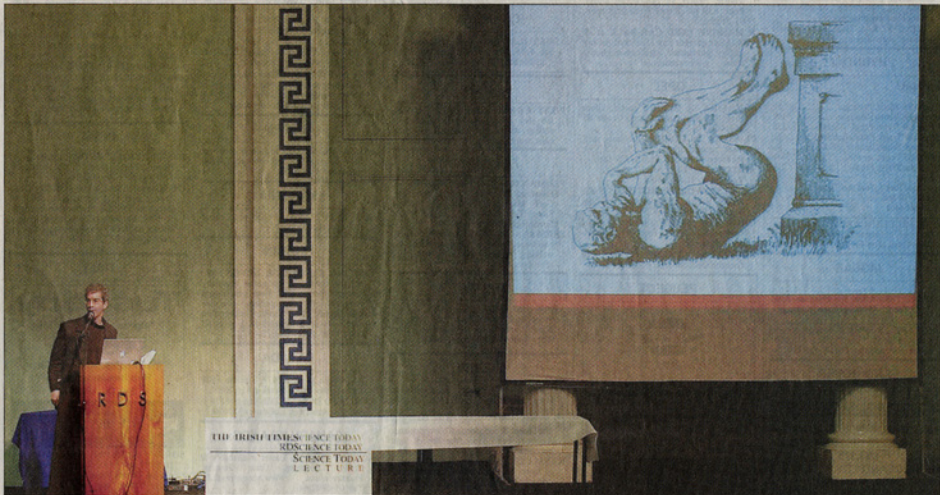
# THE IRISH TIMES

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## THE IG NOBEL AWARDS: the weird world of highly unusual scientific research



Mr Mark Abrahams delivering the Ig Nobel Awards speech at *The Irish Times*/RDS Science Today lecture at the RDS yesterday. Photograph: Eric Luke

### DICK AHLSTROM, SCIENCE EDITOR

Have you heard about the scientific research study into whether chickens prefer beautiful humans? How about a study of homosexual necrophilia in the mallard duck? No?

Surely then you read a British Standards Institute technical specification detailing over six pages how to make a cup of tea?

All of these and more were up for discussion yesterday afternoon when the

infamous Harvard University Ig Nobel Awards paid their first visit to our shores. The Ig Nobels present annual awards highlighting the most improbable research that can be found.

Now in its 13th year, the Ig Nobels present distinctions across 10 categories, delivered in a similar vein to the longer established Nobel Prizes. Beyond this, however, the similarities end very abruptly.

The Ig Nobels are on a tour of the UK, funded by the British Association for the Advancement of Science and by the

*Times Higher Education Supplement*. The tour leg in Dublin held yesterday in Ballsbridge was organised as a *Science Today* lecture presented by *The Irish Times* and by the Royal Dublin Society.

All of the research described yesterday by Ig Nobel founder and host, Mr Marc Abrahams, is very real, published in peer reviewed scientific journals. The 2003 awards included 5,000 nominations, these eventually whittled down to just 10 winners.

Like for instance the study of homosexual necrophilia in mallard ducks

described in a paper by Kees Moeliker of the Natuurmuseum of Rotterdam. He attended yesterday's event, describing how he observed one mallard killed after crashing into a window being assaulted – for a startling 75 minutes – by a second mallard.

Dr David Gadian discussed research by a winning team from the UK who studied why the brains of London taxi drivers are more highly developed than those of their fellow citizens.

● Read more improbable research at the website, [www.improbable.com](http://www.improbable.com)