

Tommy Time



Hi Kids, I'm Dr. Tommy Prawn, I'm a mad scientist that lives in the river Shannon in Ireland. My good friends at Nature's Web rang me on the watermobile and told me ye had a few questions about science and asked if I could answer them. I told the gang at Nature's Web "no probs, of course I would try to answer the questions you asked." So here I go..... Enjoy!

Remember, if you have any other science questions, just send them into editor@naturesweb.ie and they'll pass 'em on to me!

Dr. Tommy



What are the Hottest and Coldest Planets?

I had a dream the other night, that myself and my best friend Harold Eel were after getting jobs in NASA. We were just

going into space when my mother woke me for work. I hate when that happens!

Anyway, as I was up out of bed I decided to answer the question. The clouds on Venus trap heat like a greenhouse traps heat to keep plants warm. On Venus, the heat is out of control. It can get up to almost 465°C. The air is thick and deadly. Venus is a strange planet. Venus spins backwards so the Sun rises in the west and sets in the east, and because the planet rotates so slowly, a day on Venus is longer than it takes to go around the Sun. On Venus, a school day would last four months.

At a chilly -230°C, Pluto is one of the coldest places in the Solar System. You might want to make sure you time your trip for the summer months. During the winter, it is so cold that even the atmosphere freezes. Formerly the smallest planet in the Solar System, in August 2006 the International Astronomical Union redefined the term 'planet'. Now Pluto is classified as a dwarf planet.

There was you thinking Pluto was Mickey Mouse's dog. I don't think I'll be going to any of those planets if I have my space dream again. I'll stick to the moon. My aunt Breda Prawn always tells me there is loads of space between my ears, so I told her I wish she would live on the moon and stop annoying me, she was not impressed and told me to stop giving her cheek, I said prawns don't have cheeks. I was sent to my room!!

What Creature has the Biggest Brain?

I think its prawns. I'm a prawn and I can answer all these questions, so it must mean I'm very clever. Also my Uncle Alfie Prawn is always telling me I'm too smart for my own boots. I don't know what he is on about. Hello Alfie, I'm a prawn, I don't wear boots, I wear slip on sandals.



Although humans are known to be the most intelligent creatures on the planet, they don't have the biggest brain. So the first point to note is that brain size does not make you smarter or dumber than someone else. The biggest brain is inside the head of a Sperm Whale. This Great Whale's brain is six times larger than the human brain. It is by far the largest brain of any creature that has ever inhabited the Earth and thus, the largest brain for which we have evidence anywhere in the universe.

How do Dolphins Sleep?

Dolphins are mammals, so in many ways, they are just like human beings. Among other things, they have similar bone structure, are warm-blooded and give birth to "live young." The biggest differences between these animals and us as human beings are the environments in which we live. We live on land and they live in water. But how can they sleep without drowning? The solution for dolphins is to let one half of the brain sleep at a time. In this way, the animal is never completely unconscious, but it still gets the rest it needs. And where do dolphins sleep? They could probably sleep anywhere, but it makes sense that they would do it near the surface of the ocean so they can come up for air easily. It's not uncommon to see dolphins "logging," swimming slowly along the surface, with very little movement. Presumably, these are dolphins at rest.



Dr. Tommy Prawn would like to acknowledge the help of his good friend James Ring. Text: © James Ring

© 2008 Sherkin Island Marine Station & its licensors. All rights reserved.