



Purple Day 2026: Raising Awareness About Epilepsy

Observed annually on March 26, Purple Day is dedicated to increasing awareness about epilepsy and supporting those living with the neurological condition. Marked by people wearing purple, the day aims to dispel myths, reduce stigma, and encourage open conversations around seizures and treatment. Epilepsy affects millions worldwide, yet misinformation often prevents timely diagnosis and proper care. Schools, healthcare organisations, and advocacy groups host campaigns and educational drives to promote understanding and inclusion. Purple Day serves as a reminder that with the right medical support and social acceptance, individuals with epilepsy can lead full, empowered and independent lives.

#ENVIRONMENT

HUMAN IMPACTS ON BIOSPHERE

Fishes often become smaller as humans selectively harvest the biggest fish; insects and insect pests are becoming resistant to pesticides, and pathogens are becoming more resistant to antibiotics



As human disturbances to the environment driving evolutionary changes in animals and plants? A new study conducted by McGill researchers finds that, on average, human disturbances don't appear to accelerate the process of natural selection. While the finding may seem reassuring, this unexpected pattern could reflect the limited number of species for which data were available.

Many studies have shown that species evolve in response to human activity at a pace that exceeds natural rates: fish species often become smaller as humans selectively harvest the biggest fish; weeds and insect pests are becoming resistant to pesticides, and pathogens are becoming more resistant to antibiotics.

Rapid evolution in response to human activities could be caused by strengthening of natural selection, a key influence on the pace of evolution. To better understand the extent to which this occurs, Vincent Fugère and Andrew Hendry from McGill's Department of Biology reviewed thousands of scientific papers on the topic. Of these, they retained 40 that provide estimates of 'selection strength', the extent to which a particular trait is linked to survival or reproductive success (Darwinian fitness), in both human-disturbed and natural environments. These cases included, for instance, a weed species found in grasslands sprayed or not sprayed with herbicides; another involved a shark population before and after the construction of a beach resort that induced alterations in local mangrove habitat.

From the 40 selected studies, the authors compiled 1,366 estimates covering 102 traits in 37 different species. They



Tarot Is as Mesmerizing as the Decks Themselves



In 1770, Jean-Baptiste Alliette (under the pseudonym Etteilla) published the book *How to Entertain Yourself With a Deck of Cards*, providing one of the world's first guides to cartomancy, that is, fortune-telling with cards, a method still used by many fortune-tellers today. Around the same time, Antoine Court de Gébelin, a French pastor, used a section of his opus, *Le Monde Primitif* ('The Primitive World'), published from 1773 to 1782, to rewrite tarot's origin story and suggest for the first time that these cards were far more than just a game.

• Bulbul Joshi

Not far from one of Milan's last remaining medieval gates is a tiny shop door, sandwiched between shuttered storefronts. Cross the threshold, and you'll enter a gilded world of esoteric symbols: stars, skeletons and fools.

This is Il Meneghella, the workshop of some of Italy's last known great tarot artists.

Inside, on the register, is a portrait of its original owner, Ovestaldo Menegazzi. While tarot may be a game or hobby for many, for Menegazzi, it was always first and foremost about the art. Before his death in 2021, he had become world-famous for his painstaking, hand-painted reproductions of some of the world's most ancient and storied tarot decks. His desk, a mess of paints and materials, is just as he left it.

On a rainy day last spring, I met his niece, Cristina Dorsini, at the shop. Since Menegazzi's death, Dorsini, an art historian and tarot expert in her own right, has taken over guiding visitors through the masterworks created by her late uncle. Among the stacks surrounding us are three tarots: a cat-themed tarot, a Hebrew tarot and a tiny tarocchi di fumatori (smoker's tarot), wherein a characterization of

Death can be seen enjoying a curly pipe. Menegazzi published more than 100 such decks, including many of his own invention. "Each deck offers us lo scignano di sapienza," a treasure trove of wisdom, Dorsini says.

What unites these diverse decks is their standard form: generally, 78 cards, separated into 56 numbered 'minor arcana,' much like modern numbered playing cards, and 22 trumps, the 'major arcana,' each with a mysterious character. Every card is rich with symbolism: adorned with pentacles, stars, chal-

ices and wands; bearing names like the World, Justice and Temperance; and featuring enigmatic characters like the Fool, the Lovers or the Hermit. These cards may have started life in 15th-century Italy as a sophisticated game, but in the past 500 years, they have taken on an entirely different meaning.

It's the ambiguity of these figures that has drawn fortune-tellers, who use combinations of images to open a window into the future. Dorsini, following her uncle, is skeptical of such uses. "We don't do readings," declares a sign near the cash register, a frequent point of contention with visitors to the shop.

Like her uncle, Dorsini was first drawn to these cards by their beautiful artistry, and by a historian's desire to understand the origins of their imagery. "Tarot was a figurative culture that was born here, in Italy, in Milan," she says. "But today, the symbology of each card is really difficult for us to understand."

In fact, Menegazzi's shop has become famous for his decades-long quest to collect, study and meticulously reproduce the historic decks that originated many of tarot's most common figures. Some of these old decks, with just a few surviving cards, are extremely rare. In 2021, Menegazzi became the first person to reproduce one such deck in nearly 600 years.

A few days after I first held one of Menegazzi's reproductions, I traveled west, to Turin, where for a few short minutes, I was able to look at the original.

In the former stables of an Italian royal palace, I met Federica Pozzi, the director of scientific laboratories at the Center for the Conservation and Restoration of Cultural Heritage 'La Venaria Reale'. Here, a team of 12 scientists works to analyze everything from large-scale paintings to ancient Egyptian sarcophagi, as well as some of the oldest tarot cards in the world, on which they perform material analysis. Upstairs, in the con-



servation lab, the restorer applies paint, removable to allow for future correction, with a tiny brush.

Researchers around the world, including Pozzi's team, engage in a kind of historical detective work with these cards. Collaborating with six different institutions, the Morgan Library & Museum in New York, the Yale University Library, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the National Gallery of Art, Yale's Institute for the Preservation of Cultural Heritage and the Art Institute of Chicago, and drawing on other collections in Italy, Pozzi was part of the first team to use advanced imaging techniques, including macro-X-ray fluorescence spectroscopy, to discover invisible layers in the tarot cards.

These decks, known collectively as the Visconti-Sforza decks, offer the earliest blueprint for modern tarot, incorporating many of the same suits and trumps. Historical documents suggest the oldest of these, the incomplete Visconti di Modrone deck, was commissioned as a wedding present for the daughter of Filippo Maria Visconti, then Duke of Milan, and her groom, Francesco Sforza, founder of a powerful family. For many years, historians speculated that a deck, as

#SCALA MISTICA



usually fine as this one, may have simply been meant as a piece of art. Yet, Pozzi's research has shown that the surviving cards bear signs of regular use: worn edges, lost pigments, separating layers. Her lab has confirmed that several cards are replacements, suggesting that their owners wanted a full deck, and corroborating the idea that these cards were meant for gaming. Some scholars, like the tarot historian Andrea Vitali, argue that the figures on such cards were meant to offer a scala mistica, or mystical ladder, instructing wayward gamblers in moral and ethical precepts, or else perhaps, satirizing those precepts by allowing fools and lovers to trump popes.

All this evidence suggests that the earliest tarot deck may have been used for little more than a courtly card game, an exquisite plaything for the super-rich. And yet, tarot has never been so simple to define, nor its origins clear.

In Milan, at Menegazzi's workshop, I'd held one of his reproductions of the Solo Busca tarot, the earliest complete tarot deck that survives today, dating to the late 15th century. What had struck me about it was just how unlike the modern tarot it is. In place of the standard major arcana is a series of entirely different and unsettling images: obscure figures from antiquity or famous villains, like the Roman Emperor Nero, reveling in the burning of babies. The occultist Peter Mark Adams called the deck 'stub-

bornly and irredeemably odd,' writing that 'even after prolonged study, the deck retains its strangeness.'

For Adams, that oddness suggests that there is a foundational purpose to these cards other than simple entertainment. After all, tarot emerged during a very specific point in European history, when the wealthy courts of Renaissance Italy were retaining armies of scholars to recover hidden wisdom from ancient texts. In the centuries following the production of Visconti's exquisite deck, tarot's popularity as a game increased, and its production moved to France sometime in the 17th and 18th centuries. There, a new school of artists, thinkers and card readers began to see tarot as infused with a deep, occult significance.

It was in this milieu that occult writers first began to experiment with the idea that cards like these could be a key to greater wisdom. In 1770, Jean-Baptiste Alliette (under the pseudonym Etteilla) published the book *How to Entertain Yourself With a Deck of Cards*, providing one of the world's first guides to cartomancy, that is, fortune-telling with cards, a method still used by many fortune-tellers today. Around the same time, Antoine Court de Gébelin, a French pastor, used a section of his opus, *Le Monde Primitif* ('The Primitive World'), published from 1773 to 1782, to rewrite tarot's origin story and suggest for the first time that these cards were far more than just a game.

"If we heard that there still exists today a work of the ancient Egyptians, one of their books that escaped the flames which devoured their superb libraries, and which contains their pure doctrine about interesting objects, everyone would, without doubt, be eager to know," he wrote. "If we added that this book is very widespread in a large part of Europe, that for many centuries, it has been in the hands of everyone, the surprise would certainly increase."

It was the tarot, Court de Gébelin suggested, that contained just such a book. Court de Gébelin's entirely speculative account, which counted Louis XVI among its readers, spurred a European craze for all things ancient and Egyptian, and forever tied the origin myth of tarot with the stereotype of 'Gypsy' fortune-tellers, whom Gébelin credited with preserving the cards over millennia and carrying them into Europe. In reality, "there is absolutely no evidence for Roma in the origin of tarot cards, or for any significant role in their spread," says Egil Asprem, a professor at Stockholm University, who studies the role of the Roma in the European history of magic.

In the mountains just southwest of Bologna, a small stone house is home to the International Tarot Museum, founded by Morena Poltronieri and Ernesto Fazioli in 2007. Inside, Fazioli leads me around a narrow space crammed with pieces of tarot art and decks donated from around the world. There are tarot pop-up books, tarot embroidery, even tarot cards you can eat and drink. Each one is simultaneously a reinvention and a reference to tarot's past spiritual uses. "The seed of a card is universal," Fazioli says, yet "each artist has a different goal."

The psychiatrist Carl Jung in 1933 attributed the suggestive power of tarot's imagery to its use of 'psychological images,' archetypes and symbols, like crumbling towers and

stumbling foals, that can take on infinite meanings in combination with each other. Not long after Jung offered that assessment, tarot became a centerpiece of America's New Age revival and underwent thousands of subsequent reinterpretations as a tool for spiritual practice. The Motherpeace tarot, in print since the early 1980s, reimaged the deck through a feminist lens. The Black Power tarot, more recently produced by the artists King Khan and Michael Eaton, reconstructs the major arcana around images of Black icons. Collaborative decks, like the Slow Holler tarot, enlist dozens of artists from varied regional and marginalized identities to put their own spin on iconic images.

Recently, tarot's popularity has been surging again, driven partly by interest in cartomancy on social media platforms like TikTok. Some sellers say their sales have doubled or tripled in periods of strife, including the 2008 financial crisis and the Covid-19 pandemic. Many practitioners are uneasy about such booms. Jessica Lanayadoo, an astrologer and tarot reader in San Francisco, says too many think that the cards can help 'micromanage our fate,' guiding every little decision through easy answers. A more common annoyance for longtime tarot devotees may be the irony with which some new users approach the cards. "People have a way of saying, 'Oh, I'm too smart to take it seriously,'" Lanayadoo says.

Helen Farley, a researcher who has written about the history of these cards, calls tarot 'a mirror of the society in which it's being used.' Peering into that mirror today, we might see a more atomistic world, with tarot just another product to brand and sell. Yet, all around us, tarot is being reinvented. Alight upon the right deck and learn its history, and you might discover a piece of our collective future, too.

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#KRISHNARAJA WADIYAR IV

He Was More Than Noble

Gandhi once called Krishnaraja Wadiyar IV a 'rajarsi,' a king-sage, and it's not hard to see why. Educated, deeply spiritual, and intellectually curious

In an age when Indian royalty was known for diamond-studded crowns, lavish banquets, and fleets of Rolls-Royces, one monarch quietly redefined what it meant to be a king. Maharaja Krishnaraja Wadiyar IV of Mysore wasn't just one of the wealthiest men of his time, he was among the wisest, most forward-thinking rulers India had ever seen.

Born in 1884, Krishnaraja Wadiyar IV ascended the throne at a young age and ruled the princely state of Mysore from 1894 to 1940. His rule coincided with a time when the subcontinent was still under British colonial influence, and many princely states were content to bask in ceremonial grandeur. But the Maharaja of Mysore chose a different path, one marked by service, modernity, and reform.

A Philosopher-King in Royal Robes
Gandhi once called him a 'rajarsi,' a king-sage, and it's not hard to see why. Educated, deeply spiritual, and intellectually curious, Krishnaraja Wadiyar IV believed that wealth carried a moral responsibility. He used his immense fortune not to expand his palace grounds, but to build universi-



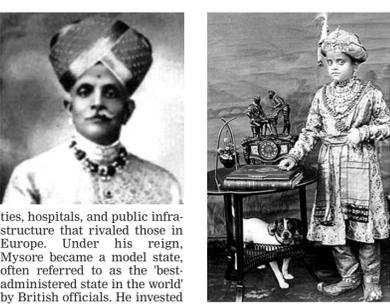
ties, hospitals, and public infrastructure that rivaled those in Europe. Under his reign, Mysore became a model state, often referred to as the 'best administered state in the world' by British officials. He invested heavily in education, establishing the University of Mysore in 1916, one of the first universities in India run by an Indian ruler. He also promoted industrialization, hydroelectric power, and railway expansion, making Mysore one of the first regions in Asia to generate its own electricity.

A Champion of Social Progress
Beyond modern infrastructure, Krishnaraja Wadiyar IV was also a pioneer of social reform. He appointed women and lower-caste individuals to high offices, encouraged female education, and enacted progressive labor

laws. In a society still grappling with deep-rooted inequalities, his policies were revolutionary. He was also deeply invested in arts and culture, supporting classical music, Sanskrit scholarship, and architecture. The Mysore Palace, as we see it today, was completed during his reign, an architectural marvel that blended tradition with modern engineering.

A Lasting Legacy
By the time of his death in 1940, Krishnaraja Wadiyar IV had set a standard that few monarchs, Indian or otherwise, could match. While other rulers left behind stories of grandeur and indulgence, he left behind institutions, ideas, and a better life for his people. In the words of British philosopher Paul Brunton, who visited Mysore during his reign: "The Maharaja is the most remarkable man I met in India... he is a saintly ruler."

Royalty with a Purpose
Krishnaraja Wadiyar IV proved that royalty could be measured not in gold or jewels, but in wisdom, compassion, and a commitment to progress. In today's world, his model of enlightened leadership feels more relevant than ever, a reminder that true greatness lies not in what one possesses, but in what one gives.

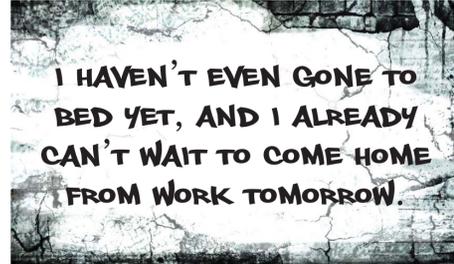


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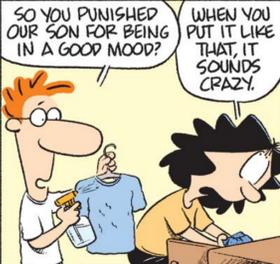
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By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman

THE WALL



BABY BLUES



ZITS



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