



# Pandas!

A panda walks into a café. He orders a sandwich, eats it, then draws a gun and proceeds to fire it at the other patrons. Why? asks the confused, surviving waiter amidst the carnage, as the panda makes towards the exit. The panda produces a badly punctuated wildlife manual and tosses it over his shoulder. Well, I'm a panda!, he says, at the door. Look it up! The waiter turns to the relevant entry in the manual and, sure enough, finds an explanation. Panda. Large black-and-white bear-like mammal, native to China. Eats, shoots and leaves.

Sure enough, the misplaced comma after eats, would have made the panda go wild and act by the definition! Lynne Truss' *Eats, Shoots & Leaves: The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation* has that interesting story about pandas and punctuation. Forget about punctuation, pandas are nice chubby creatures. That earthquake took place right in the area where giant pandas live. Many pandas are protected well, especially those babies, even if they were scared a lot. Have a look at the pictures that tell the whole story about these scared pandas.

## Green fingers

### Blinded image



Oleander

Ravi Mahendra

At the very moment when red sun beams kissed the sandy bank of the desert just before twilight fades, Angel walked alone in tears but no one could see where she had gone. The footprints she had left on the sandy bank vanished before they appeared. Everyone called her Angel because she looked like one. Angel lived in a village by the desert. As she grew older and people spoke of her beauty she became vainer. One fine evening a giant sand storm hit the village. Angel struggled and struggled and at the very last moment before giving up hope for life she felt pair of hands around her lifting her from a certain death.

The storm faded away and everything became silent. Angel woke up but she wasn't sure whether it was morning or night. She felt someone stroking her hair very gently. Angel tried to open her eyes and realised the sand storm had taken her eyesight from her. Angel couldn't bear to admit that she would never see the world again and started to hate herself and everyone in this world. The man who saved her life was the only hope she had, even though she had never met him before. His kind and gentle care prevented her from taking her own life

even though she was very depressed. As the years went by she fell in love with him and promised to marry him if she could only see the world again. One day, someone donated a pair of eyes to her. When the bandages came off, she was able to see everything, including the man who had saved her life, the man she was in love with. He asked her, "Now that you can see the world, will you marry me?" Angel looked at the man and saw that he was blind. The sight of his closed eyelids shocked her. She hadn't expected that. The thought

of looking at them the rest of her life led her to refuse him. The man left in tears and walked alone through the desert. Angel saw a sand storm approaching and the man who had given her hope to live disappeared with the storm. She felt guilty and ran towards the storm to help him. Suddenly the storm stopped and the sun shone. Angel's eyes fell upon a beautiful bush of red flowers. Nothing flowered in that part of the baked desert. She felt the dampness around the plant and smelt the tears. There was a little note written on the damp sand just under the bush saying:

"Take good care of your eyes, my dear, for before they were yours, they were mine."

According to the legend from that day on people called that plant *Kaneru* (IPA: [Kaneiru]). Blindness is referred to by the Sinhala word *Kanu*. A for that and *Ruvu* for image. *Kana-Ruvu* (blinded-that-image). That blinded image gradually became *Kaneru* for easy pronunciation. Botanically, *Kaneru* is known as *Nerium Oleander* and commonly known as Oleander.

Oleanders are normally red or pinkish red and also white, pink, cream, and less commonly, yellow. Oleanders grow in most parts of the world. They can tolerate extreme weather conditions such as droughts and to a certain extent winters. Oleander shrubs can grow up to few meters spreading erect branches if the conditions are right and they are left unpruned. The dark green thick narrow leaves come in pairs or whorls of three and the flowers appear in clusters at the end of each branch followed by long narrow capsules of seeds. Flowers are often heavenly scented and you will remember the smell. Oleanders can be cultivated by seeds and cuttings and semi hard wood cuttings are the best to propagate and restricted watering during the rooting time for best results. Less demanding Oleanders love to find a new home in the sunniest spot in your garden and they can be adjusted to any size of a garden if you provide care with bit of tender loving care. Bear in mind that Oleanders can be highly toxic, like many other ornamental plants, if eaten as its sap contains high content of medicinal properties. This toxicity never bothers me when appreciating the beauty and the scent of these heavenly flowers.

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## My notes on Samson - 11

"It's E-canies" I think I have heard the name - at least seen - the word. The vet went on examining the dog. I needed to know more on the disease, and thought of doing a web search, the first thing when I get home. Samson was turned over on the table, with his muzzle held tight. I had to hold his front paws too, in case he attempts to make a naughty move. When you slack the grip, some crazy thought crosses his mind and tries to jump down, optimistically, Samson knows we mean no

harm to him. He stirs now and then, mostly, as the Vet said, because he is not used to staying still in one place. Back at home, I have never seen him staying in one place for at least five minutes. Saline was working fast on Samson's inter veins, and the Vet continued his talk. "It's the number one contagious disease in America." "But America has no humid environment. How come it's the number one disease? Very strange, isn't it?" I took a glance at my

mother, and she had no reasons to disagree with me. "You are correct. But actually it's a very interesting story. It was first found in Vietnam. And when the First World War was over you know the prisoners were taken away from Vietnam along with their belongings. That's how E-canies found its way to America." He took a look at the saline can; it has reached half by now. "Still the worst thing is not that. Can you imagine that it can infect humans too?" "Really?"

"Yes do an Internet search on this. Just google Ehrlichiosis and go through the literature. Interesting. So even in America, this comes out mostly in summer. Normally eyes, legs, nose and scrotum are infected. Now look at his eye." He pointed to the eye with the whittened surrounding. The saline can was empty now. Time was up to take leave, but we had to come the following day too. If I am going to tell what happened the next day, it might bore you. So I am thinking on telling you something



## Haban Kukula

Scientific Name: *Galloperox bicalcarata* (Forster)

The 33-cm long partridge size hen resembles a small, brown village chickens; the cock, with his white-spangled black foreparts and dark chestnut hinder parts, is unmistakable. Strictly a forest bird, it is so shy and wary that its presence in a district would often pass quite unknown were it not for

its unmistakable cry: this reveals that it is not uncommon in much of the more densely forested parts of its range. The cry is peculiar, ringing cackle, consisting of series of three-syllabled whistles. The food of this distinctly ground bird consists of various seeds, fallen berries, termites and other insects, and it scratches vigorously for them amongst the dead leaves, etc., of the forest floor. The breeding season is in the north-east monsoon, and sometimes a second brood is raised in July-September.

The nest is a slight scrape in the ground in the shelter of a rock, bush, etc. The eggs from the normal clutch, but up to five have been recorded; they are cream or warm buff in color, and exactly resemble miniature hens' eggs in appearance. They measure about 43 or 31 mm. Its major locations are humid forests. Breeding Ground is in the Wet Zone, eastern & southern sectors of Dry Zone and seldom in the Hill Country. Rarely observed.



## Amphibians going fast

Angela Schnaebeloe

Picture taken on August 13, 2008 shows a frog in one of the vivariums of the Besancon Natural History Museum. Amphibian species are becoming extinct at a pace never seen before. For the first time, scientists have gathered enough evidence to assert that humanity might be facing one of the biggest extinction crises of recent times. Species, genera, and even families are vanishing at alarming rates. Amphibians are severely affected by habitat loss, climate change, pollution and pesticides, introduced species, and over-collection for food and pets. AFP