



The value of fingertips

MARIE-CHRISTINE O'CALLAGHAN

Do you use your fingerprint to access your phone? You may be surprised to learn that fingerprints were used for identification as far back as the second millennium BC when, in ancient Babylon, finger seals were impressed on contracts. This may be due to the recognition of the fascinating ridges, whorls and valley patterns that occur on each finger.

In 1788 the anatomist J.C.A. Mayer, having studied fingers, declared that "the arrangement of skin ridges is never duplicated in two persons." An intriguing observation at the time which became highly relevant in the 19th century when the answer to the question of 'how do you prove people are who they say they are?' proved crucial.

The breakthrough in matching prints came from Bengal, India. Qazi Azizul Haque, the head of identification for the local police department, devised a mathematical formula which became the basis of the system for fingerprint classification, it worked so well that a police officer could find a match in only five minutes. Haque and his superior Edward Henry (after whom the system was called: the Henry Classification System) used the prints to identify repeat criminals in Bengal. When Henry demonstrated the system to the British government, he was made assistant commissioner of Scotland Yard and, in 1901, fingerprinting was introduced as a major tool in criminal investigations.

The underlying premise of fingerprint identification is uniqueness. To date, no two people – including identical twins – have been found to have the same fingerprint. It has also been proven that a person's fingerprints remain

essentially unchanged throughout their lifetime.

You may remember the scene in the film 'Men in Black' when Agent J, has his fingerprints burned off, however, research has shown that any attempt to remove or damage fingerprints will be thwarted when the new skin grows. Even if the damage is extremely deep, the new arrangement caused by the damage will persist and is also unique.

In the 21st century fingerprints are routinely used in criminal cases but they are also used for accessing phones, renewing passports, applying for visas or work permits, providing biometric security to control access to secure areas or systems and conducting background checks. They also help identify amnesia victims and victims of major disasters.

Fingerprints are proving very useful but what if you don't have any? In 2007, a Swiss woman had an unusually hard time crossing the U.S. border. The woman's passport picture matched her face but when the agents scanned her hands, they were shocked to find that she had no fingerprints. The woman had a condition known as Adermatoglyphia. It is a genetic disorder which results in the absence of ridges on the palms of the hands and soles. Adermatoglyphia is an extremely rare condition which only affects a few families worldwide and, because of its rarity, getting the authorities to acknowledge its existence is always very difficult, which is why it has also been nicknamed the 'immigration delay disease'. And, of course, if you happen to have Adermatoglyphia you would need to use a PIN on your phone or face recognition, another unique form of identity.

“Πόλλ’ οἶδ’ ἀλώπηξ, ἐχῖνος δ’ ἐν μέγα”

MARIE-CHRISTINE O'CALLAGHAN

What amazing animals hedgehogs are! If they didn't exist you'd almost have to invent them. Their round bodies, elongated snouts and big beautiful black eyes make them look quite delightful.

They were not always perceived as beautiful. In the Middle Ages hedgehogs were seen as harbingers of doom. Shakespeare in his play 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' aligns the hedgehog with a whole host of unpleasant creatures: "You spotted snakes with double tongue, Thorny hedgehogs, not be seen; Newts and blindworms, do no wrong". This perception changed when Beatrix Potter wrote 'The Tale of Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle' where a small, round, twinkly-eyed busy and helpful washerwoman turns out to be a hedgehog complete with prickles.

Hedgehogs are indeed famous for their spiny prickles. They have about 7,000 of them everywhere except on their faces, legs and bellies. When a hedgehog feels threatened it will curl up in a tight spiny ball to protect itself and can stay that way for hours. The spines will do very little damage to

humans, but before you try and touch one, bear in mind that there may also be up to 500 fleas in residence.

The name of 'hedgehog' comes from its habit of going through hedges and other undergrowth in search of food, and though it has no connection with pigs, it does emit pig-like grunts when foraging, hence the ending of 'hog'. Hedgehogs will eat a wide range of invertebrate prey, from beetles and bugs to earwigs, woodlice, earthworms, slugs, snails and various insect larvae. This eating habit has given them the reputation of being 'the gardener's friend'. However, gardeners rarely see them as they are mainly nocturnal animals who, come the autumn, will find a sheltered spot, possibly under a hedgerow, to hibernate.

The species is now on the red list for Britain's mammals as 'vulnerable', which means that though it is not at risk of extinction it faces severe threats.

Agricultural intensification removed the 'patchwork quilt' of hedges, woods and small fields in which hedgehogs thrive, and insect numbers have crashed due to pesticide use, depriving hedgehogs of prey.

Contemporary garden design does them no favours. Decking, patios, artificial turf, planters and a general obsession with tidiness in our manicured outdoor spaces leave them without enough food and shelter.

There is also the problem of roadkill. A recent study by researchers at Nottingham Trent University suggested that up to 335,000 hedgehogs die on UK roads every year.

The Ancient Greek poet Antilochus wrote "a fox knows many things, but a hedgehog knows one big thing." It is to be hoped that the "big thing" the hedgehog knows is how to survive.



Photo: Alexis Fotos



Selling items of value has never been simpler.

WHETHER YOU'RE CLEARING A HOME, MOVING OR REMODELLING, I WILL GET THE BEST PRICES FOR ANY ITEMS OF VALUE YOU'RE LOOKING TO SELL

- I AM AN INDEPENDENT BROKER ACTING SOLELY ON YOUR BEHALF
- I SELL THROUGH MANY DIFFERENT AUCTION HOUSES, HIGH-END DEALERS, COLLECTORS AND PRIVATE CLIENTS
- HAVING BEEN IN BUSINESS FOR OVER 10 YEARS LOOKING AFTER MANY, MANY CLIENTS, YOU WILL ALWAYS RECEIVE MY PERSONAL DISCREET ONE-TO-ONE SERVICE (REFERENCES AVAILABLE)
- THERE IS NO COST OR OBLIGATION MEETING WITH ME AT YOUR HOME OR STORAGE FACILITY
- PROBATE VALUATIONS CARRIED OUT
- CLIENTS IN THE UK AND EUROPE
- BASED IN ST JOHNS WOOD
- DISCRETION ASSURED AT ALL TIMES

Perry Field | 07802 157500

You can also message me through my website www.simplysold.co.uk

Simply Sold