

# perspectives

December 2019 Issue

## *The Night of the Walking Red Heads*

*A League of Extraordinary Red Heads*



Illegal Immigrants  
continue to be  
**deported** in the US

Minority Groups  
**struggling** to adjust  
to life in France



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# A League of Extraordinary Red Heads

*Gingers gather upstate to celebrate the mysterious genetics behind their Day-Glo follicles, curse childhood bullies, and debunk the rumor that they're going extinct.*

Written By Ben McGrath





**“Gingers are  
kissed by fire”**

Every so often, word circulates on the Internet, and in the peripheries of the mainstream media, that people with red hair, like polar bears and coral reefs, are not long for this world. The arguments tend to involve pseudoscience—speculation about the effects of increased sunlight over the British Isles in a warming climate, misunderstanding of the nature of recessive genes—and can often be traced, like much quackery, to profit motive. An interest in selling ancestry tests, say, or hair dye. Duncan

Crary, a red-bearded redhead in Troy, New York, gets particularly energized when discussing an extinction-forecasting study produced more than a decade ago by the Oxford Hair Foundation—a group funded by Procter & Gamble. “It’s a PR. scam!” he says. Crary likes to refer to his fellow-gingers, who represent between one and two percent of the global population, as a “permanent minority.”

Shortly before 6 p.m. the other day, Crary surveyed the crowd at a riverside bar in Troy, exposed the whites of his green eyes with mischievous delight, and muttered, “The red tide is coming.” It was the seventh annual meeting of his club, the League of Extraordinary Red Heads, which convenes in October because of pumpkins and rusty foliage. Among the attendees were an eight-year-old boy sporting a T-shirt that read “MC1R,” a reference to the gene responsible for his Day-Glo follicles; a mother of three blue-eyed gingers—“the rarest combination,” she said—who recalled the efforts of a childhood nemesis to connect the dots of her freckles with permanent marker; and a Conor McGregor look-alike named Jason Eveleth, whom Crary offered as an alternative to the so-called Ed Effect. This was more quackery, attributing a recent uptick in the self-reported sex lives of male redheads to the celebrity of Ed Sheeran. Crary noted that, whereas female redheads have historically been hypersexualized (think Jessica Rabbit), their male counterparts have been stereotyped as dweebs (think Alfred E. Neuman). “Ed Sheeran is not a real macho guy,” Crary said. Eveleth, on the other hand, has a mobster’s nose and twenty-inch biceps. He objected to Crary calling him a bodybuilder, on grounds of political correctness. “I’m a professional fitness athlete,” he said.

The red tide soon numbered two hundred and spilled onto the back deck. Crary climbed a fire escape and called the



meeting to order. “There are two items on our agenda,” he said. “And the first one is ‘us.’” He singled out a local real-estate agent who brandished a fresh tattoo of the club’s logo—a Rubik’s-like quadrant of red, orange, umber, and white—on his forearm. The second item was “them.” Crary mentioned “Game of Thrones,” and said, “Red-headed characters did pretty well, didn’t they?” to whoops of applause.

He proposed a “special toast for George R. R. Martin,” the author of the novels on which the series was based and a “distinguished white-head”—a spiritual cousin. On the count of three, echoing a line from the show, the crowd shouted, “Gingers are kissed by fire!”

As a troupe of fire dancers prepared to perform, Crary received word that there was a “random red” on the premises—a potential member who had arrived unwittingly. “We get one every year,” he said. This one, named Catherine Keighery,





was from Ireland, and was visiting friends in Albany. She'd gone hiking that morning in Vermont, and then stopped off in Troy for dinner, on impulse. "Some ginger guy with a beard and a dog stopped me and said, 'Are you going to the Redhead Night?'" she explained.

Keighery's bangs shone like copper wire. "In Ireland, once a year, we have a Kiss a Ginger day," she said. "And the wise guys, they kick—'Oh, I'm so sorry,' they say. 'I misheard.' Because we are a marginalized group, as I'm sure you know." She gestured at Anasha Cummings, a hirsute Troy councilman who was elected after distributing his campaign platform printed on the backs of wearable red-beard cutouts. "Were you bullied as a child?" she asked. "I was homeschooled," he said. Crary presented Keighery with a League

membership card. "There's no dues to pay, because you already paid them growing up."

"So true!" Keighery said. "You know, the gingers are a dying breed. We're getting bred out. It's a fact."

Crary snorted. "That's been debunked!" he said. "We are not going extinct, girl. I think we predate humans. Neanderthals may have been redheads."

"So we don't all have to go ridin' a redhead?" Keighery asked, sounding disappointed.

Nearby, a dark-haired man bummed a light from a bald man, who nodded in approval. "Another leper," he said, referring not to the shared absence of ginger but to the cigarette habit.

## "permanent minority."



Figure #1 shows the percentage of red heads live in that area of the world.

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