

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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THE ODOR OF THE RAINBOW

The strange notion that the rainbow emits an odor was a subject of controversy in British newspapers in the middle of the last century. The idea is very old. Pliny, in his "Natural History," refers to an agreeable perfume of the earth "often to be recognized at the moment of sunset \*\*\* at the spot where the extremities of the rainbow have been observed to meet the earth," and in the same work he writes: "It is said that every shrub over which the rainbow is extended is possessed of the sweet odor that belongs to the aspalathos" - a plant from which a fragrant oil was obtained in antiquity. References to the odor of the rainbow are found in the works of many ancient and modern writers. Coleridge mentions the idea in his "Table Talk," Bacon in "Sylva," etc.

A British meteorologist, the late Richard Bentley, once wrote on the subject: "Everyone is familiar at a certain season of the year with the increase of scent given by plants and shrubs on a warm evening after the air has been newly washed by rain, and this would coincide often with the appearance of a rainbow. "

It is hardly necessary to add that a rainbow consists of nothing more substantial than sunlight, and hence cannot actually stimulate the olfactory nerves.

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