



Female ants don't need males

A type of tropical ant has dispensed with males altogether, according to scientists, and only the female of the species exists. Experts have discovered a South American species that is exclusively female and reproduces asexually by cloning the queen. Reproduction without sex is fairly common in the ant world, but the *Mycocepurus smithii* is the first known to be a male-free species. The phenomenon takes the stress out of finding a mate and may help keep the peace in colonies, the scientists believe. Researchers were first drawn to *Mycocepurus smithii*

by its skill at cultivating various different fungal crops for food but closer inspection raised questions about the ants' sex life. Six separate tests on the ants failed to uncover any males, researchers led by Anna Himler at the University of Texas at Austin wrote in the British journal *Proceedings of the Royal Society*. The findings run counter to scientific theories that say asexuality is an evolutionary disadvantage because it eliminates mutations and generates genetic diversity more slowly than sexual reproduction. The researchers carried out half a dozen tests, includ-

ing field surveys of colonies from Panama to Argentina, examining the reproductive system of queen ants, and testing the genes of clones and their mothers. They also tested whether bacteria could be the cause of the ants' asexuality and whether treating females with antibiotics or changing the fungus they fed on would stimulate the production of males. One possible advantage of asexual reproduction is that it avoids the need to find a mate and the efforts associated with mating, according to the researchers. © The Telegraph Group London 2008

Pocholo Concepcion
Philippine Daily Inquirer/
ANN

Filipina wows 57,000 Dodger fans

The scene has become almost routine - teenage Filipino singer Charice Pempengco wowing an international crowd with her powerful, soaring vocals.

Except that this time, four days ago, she was singing the Star Spangled Banner at the 52nd season-opener of Major League baseball that pitted the Los Angeles Dodgers against arch-rival San Francisco Giants at Dodger Stadium.

Some 57,000 fans witnessed Pempengco's performance. The question is, why was Pempengco, a Filipino, made to sing the American national anthem on US soil?

Pempengco herself was wondering, and smiled while saying that she nevertheless enjoyed the experience in an interview aired on ABS-CBN.

So how did she get the gig? At press time Pempengco's manager in the Philippines wasn't so sure whether it's her talent was directly invited or her services were offered by her US manager and talent agency.

A blogger in her jennys-corner.com website enthused: "Wow what an honour for 16-year-old Charice Pempengco to be singing Star Spangled Banner, to think she is not even an

American. We are proud of you Charice!"

Pempengco's career is guided by two groups—one in the Philippines and the other in the United States. All her overseas engagements are decided by Mark Johnson, who is also the manager of Josh Groban. But the one that looks for work for her is Creative Artists Agency (CAA), widely regarded in Hollywood as "the most powerful talent agency in the world".

CAA's talent roster is practically a who's who of A-listers and stars on film and television, and in music and sports.

They include Steven Spielberg, Brad Pitt, Tom Cruise, George Clooney, Drew Barrymore, Cate Blanchett, Anne Hathaway, Orlando Bloom, Will Ferrell, Will Smith, the CSI franchise, the creators and producers of dozens of shows like American Idol, Bruce Springsteen, Sting, Radiohead, Green Day, LeBron James, David Beckham, Tony Parker - and the person whom Pempengco has acknowledged as the one who has made her dream come true, Oprah Winfrey.

It was CAA that got Pempengco to audition for a part in the

live action/computer generated imagery movie *Alvin and the Chipmunks: The Squeakuel*.

When Pempengco went to the audition, she thought she was just vying for one of the voice parts. But after singing a few songs and imitating the voices of the three lead Chipmunk characters Alvin, Simon and Theodore, the film's producers decided to create an entirely new role - Pempengco as herself.

"I was made to play a contravida (villain)," Pempengco told the Philippine Daily Inquirer in a previous interview. "When the Chipmunks join a singing contest, they are pitted against me."

Pempengco was so happy to find out that in the movie's credits, she enjoys star billing.

Prior to her guest stint at the Dodgers-Giants game, Pempengco appeared as one of the guests in the season premiere of *Ti Lascio Una Canzone (Leavin' You a Song)*, an Italian musical variety show televised from Teatro Ariston in the city of San Remo.

The episode was said to have earned the No 1 rating of the night, peaking at 55 per cent of the viewership share during Pempengco's finale performance of Beyonce Knowles' *Listen*.

She returns home to sing the Philippine national anthem at the Independence Day celebration on June 12.



TEAM SPIRIT
Steve-O isn't letting his elimination from *Dancing with the Stars* get him down! The Jackass star (rocking the word "Save" on his knuckles) gives a thumbs up with partner Lacey Schwimmer outside the Live with Regis and Kelly studio Wednesday in New York City.



CLOCKING IN
Watch out! Eva Longoria Parker is right on time, attending the launch of *A/X Watches* Wednesday night at the SLS Hotel in Los Angeles.



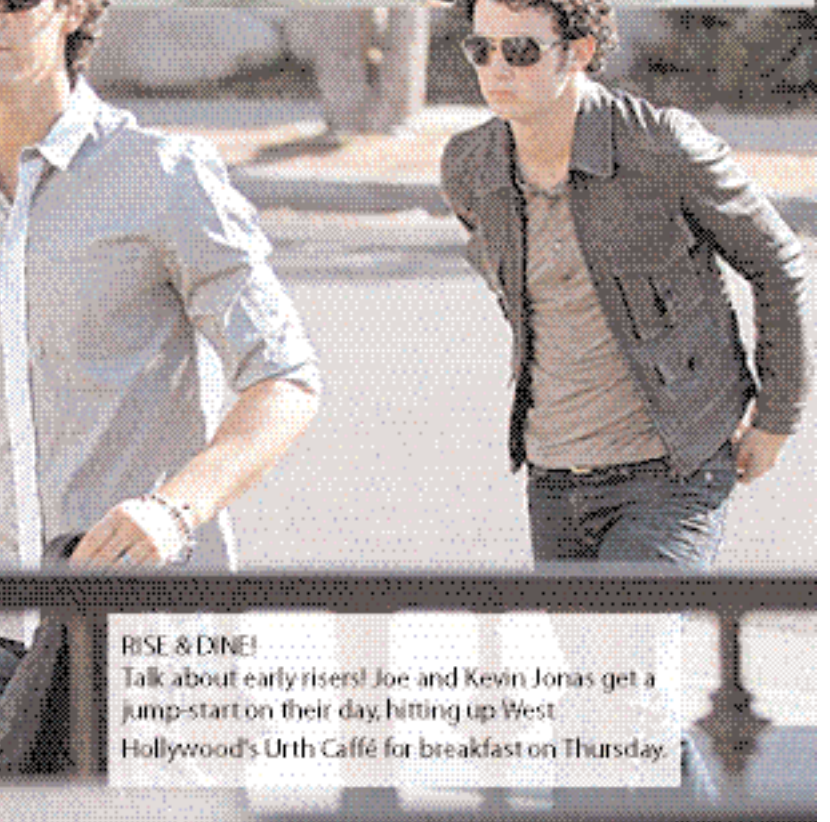
SLIP 'N' SLIDE
It's all downhill for Kendra Wilkinson as she gives powersliding a whirl Wednesday at the Levi's 3rd Annual Powersliding Championships at the Santa Monica Pier. The *Girls Next Door* star was one of the judges at the event, which featured competitors sliding down 40-ft., four-story rails and boxes.



SPACE TRAVEL
Continuing their voyage overseas, *Star Trek* costars Zoe Saldana and Chris Pine stay on point while premiering their sci-fi flick in Berlin on Thursday.



'PUFF' PIECE
After celebrating the premiere of her latest project with ex-boyfriend Justin Long, *Grey Gardens* star Drew Barrymore goes glam for an appearance on the *Late Show* with David Letterman Wednesday in New York City.



RISE & DINE!
Talk about early risers! Joe and Kevin Jonas get a jump-start on their day, hitting up West Hollywood's Urth Caffé for breakfast on Thursday.