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Edited by David Leonhardt

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# Numbers Take a Star Turn on World Statistics Day

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That special tingly feeling you're enjoying right now? It's because today is World Statistics Day. And what better way to celebrate this special day than by running the numbers?

This is only the second World Statistics Day. The first was held five years ago, on Oct. 20, 2010, a date with far greater resonance in countries where calendar convention puts the day ahead of the month: 20/10/2010.

The United Nations General Assembly was sufficiently pleased by the fact that 130 member nations celebrated that inaugural data day that they followed up with General Assembly resolution 69/282, which decided that henceforth every Oct. 20 occurring in a year divisible by five would be a World Statistics

Day.

The resolution establishing World Statistics Day was initially sponsored by 72 member states; later an additional 25 sponsors joined in. Thus, 50.2 percent of the U.N.'s 193 member nations sponsored the resolution, which was eventually adopted without a vote. While American statisticians — including our own Census Bureau — are enthusiastically celebrating World Statistics Day, it is worth noting that the United States is the only country with a major economy that did not sponsor the resolution.

Despite our inaction, World Statistics Day has joined the exclusive list of 126 U.N.-designated International Days celebrated this year, suggesting that today is more important than at least three-fifths of all other days.

The United Nations does not formally rank the relative importance of these days, but astute statisticians would note that their quinquennial celebration is one-fifth as frequent as the annual World Migratory Bird Day, and their day only takes one day, while the birds somehow stretch their celebration over two days. By this measure, you might infer that migratory birds are 10 times more important than statistics.

That said, World Migratory Bird Day has to share attention with U.N. Global Road Safety Week, while World Statistics Day has no such weekly competitor, falling as it does between World Space Week and Disarmament Week.

And while statisticians might be feeling excited about their big day, they're getting less than 0.3 percent of the recognition bestowed upon camels, llamas and alpacas, whose achievements will be celebrated all next year in the International Year of Camelids.

But we statisticians take our recognition where we can get it. And the Secretary General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon, has issued a message celebrating World Statistics Day, in which he lauds the importance of statistics

for economic development. In making that argument, he cited zero statistics.

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