

Feathers fly at claim that Roslin geneticist stole chicken data

London The Roslin Institute, the Edinburgh-based genetics centre where Dolly the sheep was created, has been accused of misappropriating research belonging to a US biotechnology company.

AviGenics, a company based in Athens, Georgia, that specializes in avian genetics, has accused Roslin researcher Helen Sang of stealing information about an AviGenics project to create chickens that express human antibodies in the whites of their eggs.

Sang, an expert in gene transfer in chickens, was on the advisory board of AviGenics until late last year. She left shortly before Roslin announced plans for a similar venture with Viragen, a Florida-based biotechnology company. AviGenics has asked the Georgia courts to stop Viragen and Roslin from proceeding with their plans.

AviGenics declined to comment on the case, but Roslin and Viragen both dismissed the action. "Our legal team has reviewed the claims and found that they are totally frivolous," says Doug Calder, director of communications at Viragen.

Relief as Japan's H-IIA rocket soars at last

Tokyo Japan's space scientists breathed a sigh of relief last week when the troubled H-IIA rocket was launched successfully.

The H-IIA's engines failed to fire during tests last summer, delaying plans for a test launch. The rocket is a new version of the H-II, which failed twice in the late 1990s, causing the loss of expensive satellite cargoes.

The H-IIA finally took to the skies on 29 August, carrying an evaluation payload to check the rocket's performance. Japan's National Space Development Agency says it now plans another test flight next year, followed by the launch of an Earth-observing satellite on the rocket in 2003.

♦ http://www.nasda.go.jp/index_e.html

Russian programmer charged in US

San Francisco A Russian computer scientist has been charged in California with five counts of copyright violations.

Dmitry Sklyarov, a doctoral student at Moscow State Technical University, and his employer, ElcomSoft, are accused of selling software that allows users to circumvent the encryption technology that protects electronic books. ElcomSoft had made the 'Advanced eBook Processor' software available on its website for \$99.

Sklyarov was arrested in June after he flew to Las Vegas to give a talk on computer-code

Massive artwork celebrates human genome



The Wellcome Trust has gone to great lengths to brighten up its new headquarters in London. Jason Middlebrook's *The Geology of Biology*, Britain's longest

artwork at 112 metres long, will be unveiled later this month. It was inspired by the publicly funded human genome project, to which the trust was a major contributor.

security at DefCon, a hackers' conference.

The arrest has prompted protest by computer scientists and hackers in Moscow and other cities around the world.

"He is a scientist, a programmer," says Sklyarov's lawyer Joseph Burton. "The critical question is: will scientists around the United States and the world face legal prosecution for doing something they consider legal? That is pretty scary."

Heart-transplant pioneer Barnard dies at 78

London Christiaan Barnard, the first surgeon to perform a successful human heart transplant, died last week, aged 78. He became internationally famous after the operation at a hospital in Cape Town, South Africa, in 1967.

In the following years, Barnard was forced to defend heart transplants against people who believed the heart to be the seat of the emotions, and against a more general concern that swapping body parts interfered with a divine plan. The heart's job is to pump blood, not emotions, he insisted.

Barnard's own heart and emotions left a trail of glamorous, if broken, relationships. But he was highly respected for both his anti-apartheid stance and his support for work with endangered species.

In later years he continued to be controversial, claiming, for example, that human cloning could be used to avoid the defects produced by nature.

\$20 million to find new ways of teaching

Washington University researchers are being offered the chance to apply for US\$1 million grants from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute to help them develop innovative approaches to undergraduate teaching.

"Research is advancing at a breakneck pace, but many college students are still listening to lectures in large classes and memorizing facts from textbooks," says Tom Cech, the institute's president. The institute hopes to create a select group of scientist/

educators who will become leaders in their fields, but is keeping an open mind about the schemes to support. Twenty grants of \$250,000 a year for four years are available. ♦ <http://www.hhmi.org>

Medical centre launches lawsuit against Genentech

Los Angeles The San Francisco-based biotechnology firm Genentech has been taken to court, accused of underpaying a non-profit medical centre from which it licensed rights to produce an insulin drug.

Scientists at the City of Hope National Medical Center, outside Los Angeles, discovered how to make recombinant human insulin some 23 years ago. Genentech licensed the rights to the discovery and marketed an insulin drug based on it. The centre now claims that Genentech has been hiding revenue it earned from the drug.

"The City of Hope and Genentech have had a good working relationship for more than 20 years, during which the City of Hope accepted \$285 million in royalty payments," says Genentech spokeswoman Sabrina Johnson. "Now they are trying to rewrite a more-than-20-year-old contract."

Toxic cowpats poison Alpine meadows

Paris French scientists met in Isère in south-eastern France last week to tackle the problem of toxic cowpats, which are damaging Alpine pasture.

The toxicity is thought to be caused by use of the drug ivermectin, which is administered to cows to protect them from parasites during the summer months, when the animals are in the pasture.

Cowpats produced by the treated cattle are poisonous to dung-eating insects, threatening the insects themselves and the small animals that feed on them. The dung can remain in the pasture for four years or more, preventing plant growth.

The researchers hope to convince the farming community to use alternative treatments in the future.