

## Climate club members limber up to combat global warming

**London** British prime minister Tony Blair is throwing his weight behind a group made up of the cities and corporations that have done most to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions.

The Climate Group, scheduled for launch by Blair this week, will host conferences and workshops every two to three months. Members will discuss the best strategies to combat climate change.

The group includes BP, an energy company that has made reducing emissions part of the job description for its senior staff and knocked almost a fifth off its emissions levels between 1998 and 2001. The municipal government of Melbourne, Australia, which is attempting to halve energy use in the city's buildings by 2020, has also signed up.

So far the group has raised about US\$2 million from governments and charities for its first few years of operation.

## Autobiography brings life to physics preprint server

**London** Looking for a place to publish your autobiography? Try following the lead of theoretical physicist Asher Peres, who last week posted his life story on arXiv, the physics preprint server hosted by Cornell University in Ithaca, New York.

This arXiv website is usually home to physics research, but its founder, physicist Paul Ginsparg, says that personal essays such as these can be posted as long as they appear in the appropriate section — in this case, 'Physics and Society'.

Peres, who studies quantum mechanics at Technion, the Israel Institute of Technology in Haifa, recounts the dangers of growing up as a Polish Jew in occupied France during the Second World War. He tells of tracking the course of the war on a hidden radio and, after the conflict, of being in the scouts with Jacques Benveniste, who later won two Ig Nobel awards for his controversial work on the memory of water.

According to a note on arXiv, the report will be published in a special edition of *Foundations of Physics* in honour of Peres' 70th birthday.

♦ [www.arxiv.org/abs/physics/0404085](http://www.arxiv.org/abs/physics/0404085)

## Failure to act blamed for loss of 113 species

**San Diego** The US government has failed to implement the Endangered Species Act properly, according to a damning report from an environmental advocacy group last week.

The Center for Biological Diversity in

## Centres trawl the sea for health tips

**New York** The link between oceans and human health is to be investigated by four research centres in the United States. The centres are being set up by the National Science Foundation and the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, and will be the first to expressly target this interdisciplinary area.

The agencies expect to invest \$5 million annually over the next five years. The centres will be based at the University of Washington in Seattle, the University of Hawaii at Manoa in Honolulu, Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution in Massachusetts and the University of Miami, Florida.

Together they will focus on identifying new drugs from marine organisms, studying disease-causing microbes and analysing algal blooms (pictured right, in a view of Florida Bay from space), including the toxic ones that accumulate in shellfish.



NASA

Tucson, Arizona, analysed the fate of plants and animals in the United States during the first 20 years of the act, from 1973 to 1994. It reports that only 19% of the 113 species that were wiped out during this period were on the endangered list.

The US Fish and Wildlife Service repeatedly failed to react swiftly enough to scientists' requests to protect species, the report says, leading to dozens of extinctions. But federal officials have challenged the accuracy of the group's conclusions.

The centre recommends that the federal government grant the US Fish and Wildlife Service's request for \$153 million to list and protect all the species on the federal candidate list. The Bush administration asked Congress for just \$17 million.

## Caviar is off the menu as beluga fish is 'threatened'

**San Diego** Although criticized for the number of species that have gone extinct in the past few decades, the US Fish and Wildlife Service made some progress this week in helping to protect the beluga sturgeon (*Huso huso*) — a fish that is prized for producing the world's most expensive caviar.

The agency has declared the fish



High price to pay: the demand for caviar is reducing the number of beluga sturgeon.

'threatened', which means the government can set strict limits or entirely ban the import of beluga caviar into the United States, the biggest market for the delicacy. Trade limits should be set within six months.

Environmental groups, including Caviar Emptor in Washington DC, say that the sturgeon should be classified as endangered, which would automatically prohibit import. But the US Fish and Wildlife Service says that the species is not in imminent danger, making 'threatened' the appropriate classification.

The beluga sturgeon was declared endangered by the World Conservation Union in 1996. Some 2 million to 3 million of the fish are thought to exist, mostly in the Caspian and Black seas. But they are suffering from habitat loss, pollution and overfishing. With a single gram of the delicacy fetching about US\$3, legal trade in the eggs is estimated to be worth \$100 million a year; the illegal trade is thought to be ten times as large.

## Green-chemistry bill passed on Earth Day

**Washington** The US House of Representatives celebrated Earth Day last week by passing a bill to establish an eco-friendly chemistry research initiative.

The bill recommends spending \$84 million between 2005 and 2007 on research to reduce or eliminate hazardous waste from industrial chemical processes. Some of the money would go on undergraduate grants for students studying green-chemistry techniques.

The bill received overwhelming support from both parties and will now be taken up by the Senate. "My guess is that it will pass with a large margin," Senator Tom Daschle (Democrat, South Dakota) told the American Association for the Advancement of Science's annual policy forum on 22 April.

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