

NASA offers fresh lease of life to old spacecraft

NASA is planning to redeploy two craft that have already performed their initial missions. The craft will be used to hunt for rocky planets and to explore comets.

The space agency will give one of the craft, the comet probe Deep Impact, two new charges. Beginning in September, it will measure nearby stars as giant planets eclipse them, looking for signs of associated rings, moons and Earth-like planets. Then late next year, Deep Impact will fly by Boethin, a small, unexplored comet, to follow up on observations of other comets.

The second spacecraft, Stardust, which originally collected comet samples, will now head to the comet Tempel 1. It is expected to reach it in 2011, and measure the crater made when Deep Impact hurled a 370-kilogram probe into the comet in 2005. The resulting debris obscured measurement of the crater itself at the time.

The redeployments are expected to cost about \$30 million each, or about 10% as much as new missions would do. "You get great science for very little risk and almost no cost," says Joseph Veverka, the Cornell University astronomer leading the Stardust redeployment.

Zurich university appoints chemist as rector

The Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH) in Zurich has completed recruitment for its top positions with the appointment of Heidi Wunderli-Allenspach, a chemistry professor there, as the university's first-ever female rector.

She will work alongside the institute's new president, Ralph Eichler, who was appointed in May. Eichler, a physicist, is currently director of the Paul Scherrer Institute, a sister research institute. Both will take office on 1 September.

The ETH has lately been rocked by internal disputes that culminated in the resignation of its last president, Ernst Hafen, in November 2006, and formal complaints to the government about perceived unfairness in the allocation of federal university funds.

Wunderli-Allenspach says that this is now a time for consolidation and reconciliation — and, perhaps, for hiring more women. "It is not a hostile place here for women, but we



Incoming rector: Heidi Wunderli-Allenspach.

Survey uncovers troupe of endangered monkeys

Conservationists say that they have discovered the largest-known population of the grey-shanked douc, or *Pygathrix cinerea* (pictured), in central Vietnam.

A team from Conservation International and the conservation group WWF said on 2 July that its members had tracked at least 116 specimens of the endangered monkey species in three surveys of Que Phuoc Commune in Quang Nam — the largest number ever observed in one place. It is thought that there are fewer than 1,000 of these monkeys left.

According to conservationists, the existence of this troupe increases the species' chances of survival.



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have to make a bigger effort, earlier on, in recruitment," she says.

Google offers the Earth to help in public education

Google has launched an initiative to help not-for-profit and public-sector groups, including scientists, use its Google Earth platform for public education.

The Google Earth Outreach programme will provide free tools and tutorials to assist people with displaying complex data sets on Google Earth, and will also make Google's own developers available to help with selected projects.

Scientists will be an important target, says programme manager Rebecca Moore, adding that the goal is to "demystify" the computing needed to convert data for ready visualization. Researchers are already using Google Earth for some scientific applications, such as the modelling of volcanic ash plumes. But the outreach effort will focus on issues of broader public interest, such as global warming, Moore says.

India pledges major role in fusion-energy project

The Indian cabinet has formally approved the country's participation as a full member in the ITER international fusion-power project, at a cost of more than US\$625 million over ten years. India will supply parts such as cryostats, power supplies and beam diagnostics.

The government said it would set up a board, whose chair will be selected by the Institute of Plasma Research in Ahmedabad, to manage its participation, the cost of which amounts to about one-sixth of India's annual research budget. "Considering India's large energy needs in the future, participation

in ITER will allow India to leap forward in terms of our capability in fusion energy," a government statement said.

The United States, Russia, the European Union, Japan, China and South Korea are the other members of the project, which is being built at Cadarache, France.

US wetlands run risk of losing protected status

The Bush administration has introduced guidelines that environmentalist groups claim will strip large swaths of US wetlands of their protected status.

The rules, issued last month, sparked the latest skirmish in a long-running dispute between the administration and environmentalists over the 1972 Clean Water Act. The act provides protection for major rivers, but not necessarily for wetlands that feed into them via tributaries. The latest guidance instructs officials at the Environmental Protection Agency and the Army Corps of Engineers to protect only wetlands that are directly connected to major waterways.

"Most wetlands don't have a continuous surface connection," says Joan Mulhern, a senior lawyer with Earthjustice, a non-profit environmental-law firm based in Oakland, California. Wetlands should be protected irrespective of that, she adds.

Nature wins major award in Spain

Nature has won the prestigious Príncipe de Asturias Award, established by His Royal Highness the Prince of Asturias, heir to the throne of Spain.

The award is the best-known cultural prize in the Spanish-speaking community. The awards honour individuals, groups or institutions whose creative work or research represent a significant contribution to universal culture in the scientific, technical, cultural, social and humanistic fields. *Nature* shares the 2007 Award for Communication and Humanities with the journal *Science*.