

POLICY

Silencing probe

Canada's information commissioner, Suzanne Legault, is to investigate claims that scientists are being silenced in seven federal agencies, including the departments of the environment, fisheries and oceans, and natural resources, and the National Research Council of Canada. Democracy Watch, a non-profit group based in Ottawa, announced the probe on 1 April. It follows a complaint jointly filed by the group and the University of Victoria's Environmental Law Centre Clinic in February, arguing that government policies prevent the media and the Canadian public from speaking to government scientists for news stories. See go.nature.com/jtvb9v for more.

Gender gap closing

The proportion of female scientists in the European Union is slowly increasing, statistics published on 5 April show. Women filled some 11% of top research positions in 2010, slightly up from 8% in 2002, finds the European Commission report *She Figures 2012*. The proportion of female PhD graduates rose by 2% to 35% in the same period. The report calls for further initiatives to close the gender-equality gap.

Morning-after pill

A senior district judge in New York has ordered the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to make a controversial emergency contraceptive pill available to girls under 17 without a doctor's prescription. In 2011, the administration of President Barack Obama overruled FDA plans to provide under-17s with access to the Plan B One-Step contraceptive pill



GERHARD SCHULZ/GETTY IMAGES

ESA puts focus on biomass

A €420-million (US\$547-million) radar project designed to measure global forest biomass in the finest detail yet is the prime contender for Europe's next Earth-observation mission. Following a meeting last month (see *Nature* 495, 15; 2013), science advisers to the European Space Agency (ESA) recommended funding the BIOMASS project over satellite initiatives that would have tracked global snow cover and

atmospheric composition. The project will measure biomass to assess terrestrial carbon stocks and fluxes including those of sub-boreal forest species such as *Fagus sylvatica* (pictured), which have an important role in the terrestrial carbon cycle. ESA is expected to announce its final decision in May; once approved, BIOMASS could launch around the end of the decade. See go.nature.com/rk1nl6 for more.

(levonorgestrel) without a prescription. In a 59-page ruling made on 4 April, Judge Edward Korman said that the government's decision was "arbitrary, capricious, and unreasonable." Allison Price, a spokeswoman for the US Department of Justice, said that the department "is reviewing the appellate options and expects to act promptly." See page 138 for more.

EVENTS

Preprint server

The open-access journal *PeerJ* has launched a preprint server (*PeerJ PrePrints*) for biological and medical sciences, onto which authors can upload draft or final

versions of articles. Authors must be paid-up members of *PeerJ* to submit more than one paper per year. The service is intended to stimulate a culture of preprint sharing among biomedical researchers who, unlike physicists and mathematicians, do not widely use the most well-known preprint server, arXiv.

H7N9 avian flu

The human toll of H7N9 avian influenza had grown to 24 cases and eight deaths as *Nature* went to press. The events were strung along China's eastern coast and centred on Shanghai, where five of the deaths have occurred. Health authorities have examined hundreds of

contacts of infected people, but not yet found any evidence that the virus is being passed from person to person. See page 145 for more on efforts to understand the virus.

FACILITIES

Lakes funding ends

Funding for research projects at the Experimental Lakes Area in Ontario, Canada, dried up this week, and scientists are no longer allowed to enter the area. Having announced in May 2012 that the freshwater research station would close, the government is now in discussions with the International Institute for Sustainable Development, a think tank headquartered

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in Winnipeg, Manitoba, over whether the institute will take over the facility. "It's up in the air as to what's going to happen," says Chris Metcalfe, an environmental toxicologist at Trent University in Peterborough, Canada, who was studying the ecological effects of silver nanoparticles at the lakes. See go.nature.com/s87rok for more.

PEOPLE

Campaigning on

Climatologist James Hansen stepped down from his post at NASA on 2 April to spend more time campaigning to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions. Hansen has directed the agency's Goddard Institute for Space Studies in New York since 1981. He was one of the first scientists to express concern that a modest rise in global temperature, of as little as 1°C above recent levels, could harm the planet. He also focused much of his effort into lobbying for stronger government action against climate change. See go.nature.com/5bvjq6 for more.

New Science editor

Marcia McNutt, former director of the US Geological Survey (USGS), will succeed Bruce Alberts as editor-in-chief of *Science*, the American Association for the Advancement of Science



announced on 2 April. McNutt (pictured) resigned from the USGS in February and will start at *Science* in June. A geophysicist by training, McNutt has also been chief executive of the Monterey Bay Aquarium Research Institute in Moss Landing, California. See go.nature.com/eyn4uu for more.

RESEARCH

Antimatter origins

The first results from the International Space Station's cosmic-ray detector, the Alpha Magnetic Spectrometer, were announced on 3 April. They confirm the presence of a mysterious excess of positrons, seen in our Galaxy by two earlier experiments, but fail to pin down its origin. The results hint that the antimatter may be produced from collisions of dark matter — which makes up around 80% of the matter

in the Universe — but could also originate from spinning superdense stars known as pulsars. See go.nature.com/sqo1s9 for more.

Tamiflu data open

Pharmaceutical giant Roche in Basel, Switzerland, will hand over data on its influenza drug Tamiflu to the Cochrane Collaboration, which conducts systematic reviews of health-care research and is based in Oxford, UK. The *British Medical Journal (BMJ)* announced the move on 4 April. The move follows an earlier attempt by Roche to allow wider access to its data, which the Cochrane Collaboration and the *BMJ* had said was inadequate.

Explorers chosen

NASA on 5 April chose the two projects that it will launch in 2017 under its Astrophysics Explorer Program — the agency's oldest continuously running programme. The Transiting Exoplanet Survey Satellite will search for planets passing in front of nearby bright stars. The Neutron Star Interior Composition Explorer is a cosmic X-ray detector that will sit on the International Space Station. NASA selected the winning projects from four proposals submitted in September 2012, concluding that they offered the "best scientific value and most

COMING UP

13–16 APRIL

More discussion about the Higgs boson features at the spring meeting of the American Physical Society in Denver, Colorado.

go.nature.com/evsjj6

15 APRIL

The US Supreme Court hears arguments over whether there should be limits on gene patents. See page 150 for more.

feasible development plans". See go.nature.com/nvbmy6 for more.

FUNDING

Action on the brain

US President Barack Obama on 2 April launched an ambitious project to probe the inner workings of the functioning human brain, calling it "the next great American project". Obama asked Congress to provide about US\$100 million in 2014 for the Brain Research through Advancing Innovative Neurotechnologies (BRAIN) initiative. The project is expected to cost billions of dollars, take at least 15 years to complete and require the development of new technologies. See go.nature.com/jczyly for more.

US research rally

Thousands of researchers, patients and patient advocates gathered in Washington DC on 8 April to call on lawmakers to protect funding for medical research. The rally was in protest against upcoming cuts that will carve 5% from the budgets of US agencies, including the National Institutes of Health. Organizers estimate that 10,000 people attended the event. See go.nature.com/lcs7v6 for more.

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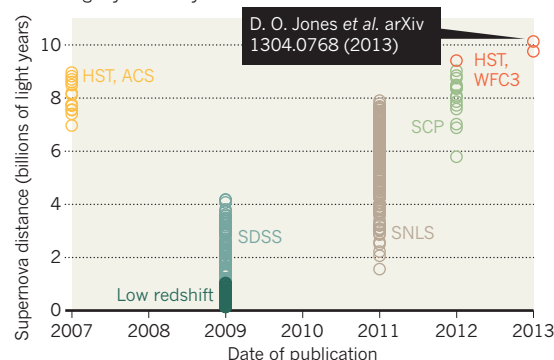
www.nature.com/news

TREND WATCH

The Hubble Space Telescope has spotted the farthest supernova yet seen of type Ia, which are used as 'standard candles' to measure cosmic distance. The 10-billion-year-old supernova UDS10Wil was spotted in 2010 by Hubble's near-infrared Wide Field Camera 3; it took three years for David Jones at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland and his colleagues to complete their analysis of the find, which is 350 million years older than the previous record holder.

RECORD FOR 'STANDARD CANDLE' SUPERNOVAE

Astronomers last week announced a type Ia supernova more than 10 billion light years away.



SCP: Supernova Cosmology Project; SNLS: SuperNova Legacy Survey; SDSS: Sloan Digital Sky Survey; low-redshift: assorted low-redshift discoveries; HST, ACS: Hubble Space Telescope with Advanced Camera for Surveys; HST, WFC3: Hubble Space Telescope with Wide Field Camera 3.

SOURCE: DAVID JONES, JOHNS HOPKINS UNIV.