

POLICY

Anti-ageing trial

The US Food and Drug Administration has informally agreed to allow researchers to test whether the diabetes drug metformin prolongs healthy lifespan in humans, said leaders of a proposed clinical trial on 30 November. Physician Nir Barzilai of the Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York City and his colleagues plan to study the drug in individuals who have, or are at risk, of age-related disease. Details of the trial, called Targeting Aging with Metformin, are still being formalized.

Gene-editing talks

Gene-editing technologies should not be used to modify human embryos that are intended for use in establishing a pregnancy, declared a 3 December statement prepared by a global conference on genome editing. The International Summit on Human Gene Editing, a three-day meeting at the US National Academy of Sciences in Washington DC, also called for cautious development of gene-editing applications that cannot be passed on to offspring — such as correction of the mutations that cause sickle-cell disease or modification of immune cells to target cancer. See page 173 for more.

EVENTS

Draft climate deal

On 5 December, negotiators at the United Nations climate talks in Paris released a draft agreement to reduce global greenhouse-gas emissions. The 48-page document will be debated by government ministers, with the aim of agreeing a new global climate deal by the scheduled end of the talks, on 11 December.



GALAPAGOS NATL PARK

Lonesome George was not alone

The Galapagos National Park (GNP) is attempting to restore two lineages of extinct giant tortoise, including the Pinta tortoise species that went extinct when Lonesome George died in 2012. Many of the tortoises on Wolf Volcano, on Isabela Island, are known to be hybrids with mixed ancestry, and on 4 December the GNP announced that its

rangers had brought 32 of these tortoises into captivity (pictured). Two of these, a male and a female, are not close relatives of George, but they share some genes with his Pinta species. Five animals are hybrid descendants of the Floreana tortoise, which vanished in the nineteenth century. See go.nature.com/tqsidx for more.

One of the big questions is how countries' progress on meeting their pledges will be reported and reviewed. The United States has pushed for better monitoring of emissions by developing countries, but many of these nations worry about the cost and feasibility of doing this. See go.nature.com/coante for more.

Ivory price falls

The price of ivory in China has plummeted, raising hopes for a reduction in elephant poaching. Raw ivory fetched an average of US\$2,100 per kilogram in Beijing in 2014, but the price last month was \$1,100 per kilogram, according to independent researchers Lucy Vigne and Esmond Martin,

working with charity Save the Elephants. China has attempted to clamp down on its domestic ivory trade, and celebrities have highlighted the damage to elephant populations. A drop in price could lead to fewer elephants killed in Africa, says Save the Elephants.

Red smog alert

On 7 December, Beijing issued its first red alert for air pollution under a system put in place in 2013. The red alert, for heavy pollution expected to last for three or more days, was planned to be in effect until midnight on 10 December. Some industrial plants and construction sites shut down and schools were advised to close. When the

alert came into effect, one measure of air quality, the level of particulate matter less than 2.5 micrometres in diameter, was nearly 300 micrograms per cubic metre. The World Health Organization says that levels greater than 25 micrograms can start to affect health.

RESEARCH

Australian rankings

The quality of research in Australia has improved, according to the results of a nationwide audit published on 4 December. The 2015 Excellence in Research for Australia exercise found that 35% of university departments submitted for assessment had improved

on the results obtained in a similar 2012 exercise, with 32% of submissions being judged “well above world standard” compared with 18% three years ago. An unofficial ranking by *The Australian* based on the audit judged the Australian National University in Canberra to be the country’s top institution.

FACILITIES

Telescope blow

Hawaii’s supreme court dealt a major blow to the Thirty Meter Telescope (TMT) project on 2 December, when it revoked the permit allowing the mega-telescope to be built near the summit of Mauna Kea. Many Native Hawaiians have protested against construction on what they regard as a sacred mountain. The court said that Hawaii’s Board of Land and Natural Resources should not have approved the permit in 2011, because it did so before protestors could air their side in a contested case hearing. TMT officials must now apply for a new construction permit if they wish to proceed. See page 176 for more.

Base on skis

The British Antarctic Survey has started planning the process of moving its Halley VI research station (pictured), which is



threatened by a crack in the ice 7 kilometres away that could cut it off from the rest of the shelf. The station consists of 8 connected pods resting on skis on the 150-metre-thick Brunt Ice Shelf. It is designed to be transportable, but the move will be the first since the station became operational in 2012, and comes earlier than expected. In July 2014, during the Antarctic winter, the base temporarily lost power as temperatures outside plummeted to -55°C . The move is expected to be completed in the 2016–17 Antarctic research season.

FUNDING

Facebook fund

Health research is among the priorities of a new foundation to be created by Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg and

his wife, Priscilla Chan. In an open letter on 1 December to their daughter, Maxima, the couple announced that they will invest most of their wealth in a limited-liability corporation called the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative, dedicated to improving health and education. The letter names as priorities disease prevention, heart disease, cancer, stroke and neurodegenerative and infectious diseases.

Australian cash

The Australian government on 7 December announced a 4-year, Aus\$1.1-billion (US\$790-million) National Innovation and Science Agenda. The pot includes Aus\$106 million of tax incentives for early-stage ‘angel’ investors, Aus\$75 million for

COMING UP

14–18 DECEMBER

Scientists gather in San Francisco, California, for an American Geophysical Union meeting — and an advance screening of the latest Star Wars film. fallmeeting.agu.org/2015

15–20 DECEMBER

Chemists head to Honolulu, Hawaii, for the Pacificchem congress. www.pacificchem.org/

a digital and data productivity network, and Aus\$127 million for research grants. The government also made a Aus\$1.5-billion promise to secure funding for the country’s threatened research infrastructure over the next 10 years. National research agency the CSIRO, which last year suffered a Aus\$111-million funding cut, will get Aus\$70 million towards a Aus\$200-million innovation fund.

PEOPLE

ORI head named

Neuroscientist Kathryn Partin has been made head of the US Office of Research Integrity (ORI), according to an article in the *Report on Research Compliance* on 3 December. The ORI oversees investigations into misconduct concerning researchers funded by the US Department of Health and Human Services. Partin is currently assistant vice-president for research at Colorado State University in Fort Collins, where she heads the university’s research-integrity office. She replaces interim director Don Wright, who has led the agency since previous director David Wright resigned in March 2014.

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TREND WATCH

Money spent on neglected-disease research rose by US\$150 million in 2014 to \$3,377 million, says the latest G-FINDER report from analysts Policy Cures in Sydney, Australia. Investments made to tackle the 2014 Ebola epidemic in West Africa were responsible for the rise. Apart from Ebola, three diseases received the most funding: HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis, as in previous years. But removing Ebola investments from the figures shows that public funding for neglected diseases is at a seven-year low, says the report.

FUNDING BOOST FOR NEGLECTED DISEASES

Funding in research and development for neglected diseases increased in 2014, but only because of investments for Ebola.

