# Q&A

Taxonomist **Douglas Yanega** has been appointed to the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature (ICZN) in London.

**How did you become interested in taxonomy?**
I was always curious about living things. During my senior year of college, I showed my entomology professor specimens of sweat bees nesting in my driveway. Their biology was unknown and my professor encouraged me to document it as an undergraduate thesis project, which evolved into a PhD dissertation.

**Were you surprised by the appointment to the ICZN?**
Yes. I'm an opinionated individual, and my opinions don't go down too well with large segments of the taxonomic community.

I think the present system by which we name species is not policed effectively and has loopholes and ambiguities. For example, scientific names can be published in journals without peer review. Although that freedom is fine, the reality effectively permits taxonomic vandals to plagiarize others or publish without scientific merit.

The ICZN, a 28-member commission, is now trying to deal with this and other messy issues. I advocate substantial changes to the code, such as provisions for online-only publication, but others prefer the status quo, which makes for a contentious debate.

**Have you had a career-defining moment?**
I can't pick one moment. The thrill of making new discoveries drives my work. When you work with insects, virtually everything you do is a discovery because so few species have been studied in depth.

I have personally discovered at least 200 species, which have all been gratifying. In my current position I oversee one of the largest collections of insects in North America at the Entomology Research Museum at the University of California, Riverside.

**What has been your biggest career challenge?**
Entomology as a discipline doesn't get much respect or support. Unfortunately, no one seems to care about the estimated 10 million undocumented life forms on this planet. However, as a career choice, it is phenomenal. I help bring attention to these species. Unfortunately the current California budget turmoil has put my career at risk because I'm considered a staff member rather than a faculty member.

**Do you think your ICZN appointment will help your career survive lay-offs?**
As it is not a paid position, serving as a commissioner on the ICZN is ultimately a matter of prestige. But my standing at the university depends entirely on the interest of administrators overseeing my position. So I hope they will be sympathetic when assessing the nature and impact of my work. But I worry that entomology doesn't garner much respect.

**What do you value most about the scientific process?**
That in the long run, reason does win out. As a reasonable person, you like to see the proper outcome. ■

**Interview by Virginia Gewin**

**POSTDOC JOURNAL**

# Wealth of knowledge?

Several years ago, while still a student at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, I told a friend that I would be spending six months at the University of Calgary in Alberta. He joked that I was a "mercenary for science". That joke has become a depressing reality.

In the past six years, I've lived in five locations across the United States and Canada. I feel as though I lack roots. I am constantly moving, living out of boxes, leaving friends and adjusting to a new town. It is a solitary, nomadic life.

In those six years I have accrued an enviable hoard of scientific wealth. While a graduate student enrolled at Cornell in a department famous for nonlinear dynamics, I plundered the University of California, Berkeley, for knowledge of metabolic biochemistry and the University of Calgary for knowledge of muscle mechanics. As a postdoc, I raided the University of Vermont in Burlington, escaping with invaluable experience in experimental single-molecule biophysics. Now at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland, I am greedily absorbing the very latest in theoretical biophysics. But even with all this wealth, I just want a place to call home.

In a few months, I begin the next round of faculty applications, and I think I need to change my mindset. Maybe I should stop thinking about how to maximize my knowledge and instead start thinking about where I want to live. I just hope I've amassed enough scientific wealth to afford the rent. ■

**Sam Walcott is a postdoc in theoretical biophysics at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland.**

# IN BRIEF

## Energy bill to create jobs?

Calls to create clean-energy jobs were a common refrain at a 7 July US Senate hearing for a bill pending in Congress. The Waxman–Markey bill aims to create jobs, reduce global warming and encourage the use and creation of alternative sources of energy. The House of Representatives passed the bill on 26 June and the Senate is likely to introduce its version this autumn.

Senator Benjamin Cardin (Democrat, Maryland) argued that the priority should be to foster green jobs. "This bill is about keeping jobs and expanding jobs," he said. Senator Kit Bond (Republican, Missouri) countered that the bill would "impose new energy taxes", reduce jobs and create a "bureaucratic nightmare to implement a carbon cap-and-trade programme".

## Californian budget woes

More than 300 scientists from the University of California system are protesting proposed state budget cuts that they warn will endanger California's science and technology enterprise.

In a 6 July letter to Republican governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, the scientists caution that the cuts "are likely to destroy" the university's status as "the leading public university in the United States". The cuts would lead to salary reductions, resignations and would jeopardize the university's ability to attract new faculty members, the document says.

A spokeswoman for the governor says the state's US$26-billion budget deficit has created a "worst-case scenario" in which the cuts are unavoidable.

## Physicists wanted

A boost in funding and a shift in focus to photon science have prompted expansion at the SLAC National Accelerator Laboratory in Menlo Park, California.

Lisa Mongetta, the lab's human-resources manager, says the lab is seeking more than half-a-dozen physicists, research scientists and engineers, although she warned that the number could change rapidly. In recent weeks SLAC has filled dozens of other positions. The expansion is a reversal of fortunes for the lab, which in January 2008 announced it would shut down one of its colliders as a result of budget cuts (see *Nature* 451, 235; 2008).