

MOVERS

Exequiel Ezcurra, director, University of California Institute for Mexico and the United States, Riverside, California



2005-08: Provost, San Diego Natural History Museum, and director of the Biodiversity Research Center of the Californias, San Diego, California

2001-05: President, National Institute of Ecology, Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources, Mexico City, Mexico

In a strange way, Argentina's political upheaval granted Exequiel Ezcurra opportunities to advance his scientific career. His communication skills made him a mainstay at the interface of politics and science and his new position, as the director of the University of California Institute for Mexico and the United States (UC MEXUS) in Riverside, California, will put those diplomatic skills to use.

When a military junta took power in 1976 and dissidents started 'disappearing', many scientists left Argentina or stayed abroad (see *Nature* 451, 494-496; 2008). Ezcurra's publication of several papers after graduation eased his path to the United Kingdom: the University College of North Wales in Bangor, invited him to do a master's degree and he stayed on to do a doctorate in plant ecology.

Ezcurra garnered funding from the non-profit Ford Foundation to pursue his PhD on desert ecology at the USA-Mexico border. He designed a biodiversity and vegetation survey of the Sonoran desert to help the local government create a protected area. But to his frustration, the incoming governor shelved the project. Ezcurra pursued his research career, while writing science books for the general public. In 1992, Mexican cabinet minister Luis Donaldo Colosio read one of these books, contacted Ezcurra and revived the decade-old survey to establish the protected area. "I learned that when you do good science to build a good case, the opportunity to use it will eventually arise," Ezcurra says.

Later, as research director of San Diego Natural History Museum in California, Ezcurra helped to make the museum's first IMAX movie, *Ocean Oasis*, a financial and critical success. "That was a life-changing experience for me because millions of people saw it — a much bigger audience than will read a scientific journal paper," he says.

In 2001, he became president of Mexico's new National Institute of Ecology. In addition to setting up successful rehabilitation and restoration projects, Ezcurra used the Internet to distribute all government environmental publications, including real-time air-quality monitoring data. His efforts instilled credibility in the nascent institute.

As the new director of UC MEXUS, Ezcurra steps into the shoes of founding director Arturo Gómez-Pompa, a renowned ecologist. Stanford ecologist Rodolfo Dirzo can't think of anyone better suited. "Exequiel knows the Mexican and US environments — ecologically, socially and politically — in a most impressive way," he says, lauding Ezcurra's universal world-view and scientific acumen. ■

Virginia Gewin

CAREERS & RECRUITMENT

Just cure it

Cancer researcher Brian Druker is adapting Nike's 'Just do it' slogan to 'Just cure it'. Oregon Health & Sciences University's (OHSU) Cancer Institute in Portland has received a \$100-million personal donation from Phil Knight, co-founder of the Portland-based footwear giant. The renamed OHSU Knight Cancer Institute has an ambitious agenda: to assemble a world-class personalized cancer-care research enterprise that incorporates genomics, bioinformatics, diagnostics and translational medicine.

"I'm hoping to move away from the twentieth-century paradigm of attacking cancer blindly by building the next generation of twenty-first-century cancer investigators," says Druker, who conducted pivotal clinical trials of Gleevec (imatinib), a drug used to treat chronic myeloid leukaemia. He says the new effort will include identifying critical targets for therapy, developing tools for early detection and more effectively using the immune system to make vaccines for cancers with viral aetiologies.

Druker will recruit up to five lead scientists and their staff immediately to fill existing laboratory space. But his aim is to find scientists not afraid to apply new technologies or to take risks. "I don't want my biases to lead

us only in one direction," he says.

Although he expects to hire a few senior scientists as well as up-and-coming researchers working on cancer breakthroughs, Druker says he first needs a leadership team in place. "My most pressing needs include a director of the basic cancer-research effort as well as people to direct our clinical translational research effort, particularly in breast and gastrointestinal cancers," he says. He will match clinicians with basic scientists to build the bridges needed for this multidisciplinary approach to succeed.

More clinicians will be needed later to treat patients in a phase-I clinical-trial programme. By creating a joint clinic-research enterprise, Druker will be able to funnel clinical revenue into the research institute.

Tom Beer, director of the institute's prostate cancer programme, says that the OHSU offers many career opportunities working on breast, gastrointestinal, genitourinary and lung cancers. "It is incredibly exciting to be part of an organization on a steep path of growth, which should be compelling to mid-career faculty members ready to stretch their wings," he says. In that regard, Beer says their biggest asset is Druker, with his energy, vision and expertise. ■

Virginia Gewin

POSTDOC JOURNAL

All work and no play

It was an ordinary day at the office. My nose was a frozen spike of ice, rain pattered on my leather hat, and I'd momentarily lost my focal group. A gelada genteelly passed gas behind me and I became aware of the soft babbling of 250 monkeys on the way to their sleeping site. There was a big smile on my face. What an office!

I feel more inspired by this work than any other employment I've undertaken. Perhaps the isolation is having an effect. This field site stands in sharp contrast to the site for my PhD, where there was a lively social scene. I enjoyed that time immensely. Dare I admit that I spent most of my days in the field there pondering the intricacies of relationships, social blunders and old-fashioned gossip?

Now — shockingly — I find myself thinking about work. Yes, I have times in which I daydream about my loved ones and the next holiday, but those are brief moments. My mind is so uncluttered that I am constantly evaluating experiments, trying to look at different angles of research questions, wondering which PDFs I need to find when I'm in civilization again.

At least during daylight hours, my thoughts instinctively run that way. Is this when I discover that my career is taking over my life? Send me someone — anyone! — and we can discuss the matter ... ■

Aliza le Roux is a postdoctoral fellow in animal behaviour at the University of Michigan.