

## French agency seeks inquiry into 'forged' coelacanth photo

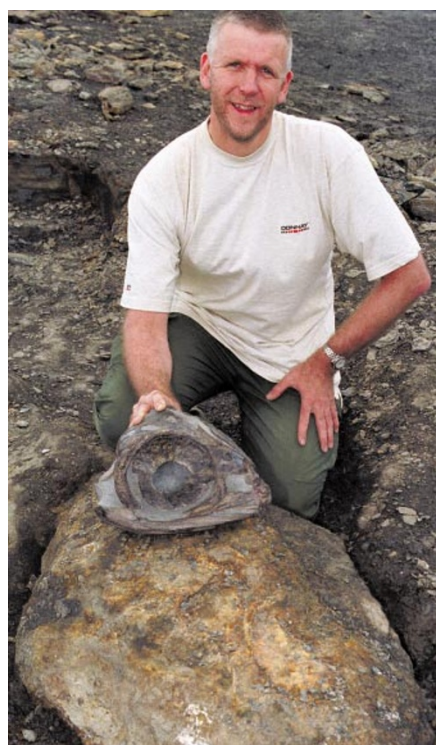
**Paris** A French development agency has asked a court to inquire into a recent attempt to publish a paper containing an apparently forged photograph. The photo was intended to prove the discovery of a coelacanth off the coast of Indonesia in 1995.

The image of the 'living fossil' fish is identical to a 1998 photograph of a coelacanth taken by a researcher at the University of California, Berkeley (see *Nature* 406, 114; 2000). The Institut de Recherche pour le Développement has launched a formal investigation, and lodged a complaint 'against X' for forgery with the Tribunal de Grande Instance in Paris — the standard procedure in France when there are no charges against a named individual.

Both of the institute's researchers, ichthyologist Bernard Séret and geneticist Laurent Pouyaud, deny any wrongdoing. So does an independent consultant, Georges Serre, formerly affiliated to the institute, who gave Séret the photo in May to back up his claim to have caught the fish off southwest Java in 1995.

## Ichthyosaur emerges from the Yorkshire landscape

**London** The near-perfect remains of a 4.5-metre-long ichthyosaur have been uncovered near Whitby in Yorkshire. The find was made



One I found earlier: Foster holds a piece from an earlier ichthyosaur discovery above his new fossil.

by a local amateur palaeontologist, Brian Foster. A spokesperson for the Yorkshire Museum, which is leading the dig, says the specimen is perfectly articulated, with none of the bones moved from their original position. The skull also appears to have been preserved in three dimensions, rather than its more usual fate of being squashed virtually flat.

## Extrasolar planets get smaller and closer

**London** Astronomers announced this week that they have discovered nine more planets orbiting beyond the Sun — including one that is a mere 10.5 light years from Earth. A meeting of the International Astronomical Union in Manchester heard that the closest planet was orbiting a star visible to the naked eye, Epsilon Eridani.

The nearby planet is estimated to be 0.8–1.6 times the size of Jupiter. The discovery brings the number of so-called extrasolar planets to 50. One of the nine newly discovered planets — HD 8344c — has the smallest projected mass for a planet found to date, only 0.15 Jupiter masses.

## Astronomers' campaign saves Kitt Peak telescope

**San Diego** The 12-metre telescope at Kitt Peak in Arizona has been reprieved, following a group of astronomers' bid to save it (see *Nature* 406, 8; 2000). The National Radio Astronomy Observatory, which planned to close the facility at the end of last month, has temporarily transferred running of the telescope to the University of Arizona's Steward Observatory.

Arizona officials have raised enough money to keep the telescope staffed and functional for six months while they attempt to obtain long-term funding from the National Science Foundation.

## UK government holds on to stem-cell report

**London** Pressure is mounting on the British government to publish a delayed report into whether nuclear-replacement technology should be used on human embryonic stem cells. The report was written for the government's chief medical adviser by a panel of scientists, doctors and ethicists in an attempt to assess the benefits and risks of so-called therapeutic cloning, as well as alternatives to it.

Last week Lord Sainsbury, the UK science minister, said he thought that the potential medical benefits outweighed any other considerations. But his department later said this was a "personal view". The Department of Health is refusing to comment, other than saying that it will publish the report — and the government's response to it — later this month.



Dresselhaus (right) is sworn in by energy secretary Richardson, accompanied by her husband.

## US energy department gets new head of research

**Washington** Millie Dresselhaus (above), a solid-state physicist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, was this week sworn in by US energy secretary Bill Richardson as the director of the Department of Energy's Office of Science. Dresselhaus's most recent research was on the use of carbon nanotubes and high-temperature superconductors in electronics.

## Rising costs threaten NASA mission to Pluto

**Washington** NASA officials have denied rumours that the agency has scrapped a planned fly-by of Pluto because of increased estimates of the mission's cost. But in an e-mail to planetary scientists last Friday, Carl Pilcher, NASA's director for Solar System exploration, is reported to have said that the 'Pluto–Kuiper Express' (PKE) is in "serious jeopardy".

The threat to the PKE stems from NASA's realization that it cannot afford to meet its commitments to a series of high-profile missions (see *Nature* 405, 4; 2000). The Europa Orbiter, intended to explore Jupiter's icy moon, has already been delayed from 2003 to 2006. But the PKE cannot be delayed in its current form, as it requires a gravity 'slingshot' as it flies past Jupiter.

## Clinton's adviser criticizes Congress science moves

**Washington** Neal Lane, President Bill Clinton's science adviser, last week criticized the Congress's approach to funding US science. In its revisions to the administration's budget request, Congress is again emphasizing biomedical research at the expense of other programmes (see *Nature* 406, 221; 2000).

"Unfortunately, Congress has currently stalled our progress toward our shared national goals and toward balance in a healthy R&D portfolio precisely at the moment in history when we can best afford to invest in America's future," said Lane.