

stem-cell research, but fear that Bush may ban the research before then.

The US National Institutes of Health last year approved guidelines for government funding of stem-cell research, but not their derivation from human embryos. Instead the cells have to be extracted from 'left over' embryos created during *in vitro* fertilization. Anti-abortion groups have lobbied against the work, and the Bush administration has hinted that it will reverse the decision.

The letter echoes the stance of patient groups who back embryonic stem-cell research because of its potential to treat disease.

Centres to study threat of illegal aliens in the water

Washington Two major US ecological research centres are launching a new collaboration to study the threat of non-indigenous aquatic species in US waters.

The Smithsonian Environmental Research Center in Edgewater, Maryland, and the Florida Caribbean Science Center run by the US Geological Survey (USGS) are teaming up to research non-native plants, animals and microorganisms in US ecosystems. The USGS believes invasive species are the second biggest threat to native biodiversity, after loss of habitat.

The collaboration will make use of an existing USGS database on invasive species in freshwater species and the Smithsonian's data on non-native organisms brought into US waters by ballast water used on ships.

Mouse cancer model repository opens

Washington The US National Cancer Institute's mouse cancer model repository has declared itself open for business.

Located at the Cancer Research Center in Frederick, Maryland, the repository has breeder pairs of two strains available, and plans to add 30 more strains by the end of the year. Researchers have been invited to submit strains and suggest desirable ones. Samples of less popular strains will be cryopreserved.

► <http://web.ncifcrf.gov/researchresources/mmhcc/default.asp>

Very short flight of NASA's long-duration balloon

Sydney A NASA project to study cosmic radiation is on hold after a giant data-gathering balloon sprang a leak just hours after being launched on its maiden flight last weekend. The inappropriately named Ultra Long Duration Balloon was brought down by remote control. NASA scientists are now



Grounded: what burst NASA's big balloon?

trying to figure out what went wrong.

The 60-metre-wide balloon, which is seen as a potentially cheap alternative to satellites, should have circumnavigated the globe for two weeks, skimming along the top of the Earth's atmosphere. NASA is hoping to launch a replacement balloon within a week.

Correction: The News item "BSE crisis sinks German public biotech programme" (*Nature* 409, 549; 2001) quoted Andreas Tierfelder, spokesman for the German subsidiary of Monsanto, as saying that the cancellation of the programme "is a substantial loss of image to our business". *Nature* accepts that Monsanto does not view its image to have been damaged in any way. Monsanto intends to participate in the programme, if it continues at a later date.