

Collaboration still the key to Rosetta

SIR — Your News article about the decision of the US National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) to reduce its commitment to the Rosetta mission (*Nature* 383, 469; 1996) merits praise for bringing to general attention the unfavourable evolution of international collaboration in space science.

It is regrettable that, when budgets decline and opportunities for national scientists decrease, the will to find a place for international partners decreases. We should fight this trend, and the European Space Agency (ESA)'s Science Programme is committed to offering as many opportunities as possible for international cooperation.

From this perspective, I should like to express some reservations about your article, whose stress on the negative aspects can only aggravate the situation.

As the article correctly states, both agencies regret what has happened. And, although it is true that "the United States has pulled out as a major contributor" to the Rosetta mission, it has not pulled out altogether. At the meeting in Washington in September, NASA stated its intention to: continue support to the three US principal investigators on the Orbiter, and consider

support to the US co-investigators; continue support to the previously selected US interdisciplinary scientists; provide a reasonable level of support through the US deep space network; assist, when requested by ESA, in assessing the technical status and progress of any aspects of the Rosetta mission (including the lander); and consider funding any US experiment that could be included in the remaining Rosetta lander.

International collaboration is becoming difficult; let us not make it more difficult by creating reasons for bitterness where there should be none.

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Female forum

SIR — I was outraged and saddened by Dan Graur's letter (*Nature* 383, 116; 1996) about the conference on "Women in Evolution" held at the University of Arkansas in September.

As a participant and workshop discussion facilitator at this conference, and as the bearer of a single X chromosome, I should like to respond. It is true, as Graur points out, that only women were invited as guest speakers, but the conference was not limited

to women. Nearly a quarter of the registrants were male (30 of 134). Graur was not excluded.

Graur's cynical letter leaves the impression that women have not been discriminated against in the field of evolutionary biology. Most informed individuals agree that women have indeed been marginalized and excluded in the past. Although there is less difference in academic rank between men and women in biology than in other scientific fields (*American Scientist* 84, 63–71; 1996), there is poor representation of women in biology faculties in the United States and elsewhere. When academic couples near the completion of their respective PhDs, women are more likely to forgo their careers in deference to their male partners because of the perception that men advance in their careers more readily than women.

As the organizer, Sydney Cameron of the University of Arkansas, said, the conference goal was "to present some of the key areas of evolutionary biology" and "to discuss important issues concerning women and science". By featuring women as speakers, the conference demonstrated the achievements of women in evolutionary biology and the social and professional climate within which they have worked.

Women and men are not treated equally in academic science, including evolutionary biology. Conferences that feature women speakers can help to convince male partici-

To **save an hour**
each time you
purify histidine-
tagged proteins,
put it on the
tip of a syringe

