

Survey reveals extent of tsunami havoc along Sri Lankan coast

San Francisco Researchers on a geological survey of the tsunami-hit Sri Lankan coast have released their preliminary results.

The International Tsunami Survey Team, which flew out a fortnight after the waves struck on 26 December, collected data and eyewitness reports for some of the worst-hit coastlines in the east and south of the island (see *Nature* 433, 350–354; 2005). The team observed that even neighbouring beaches showed very different levels of flooding and destruction, depending on coastal orientation and underwater topography. The limit of the tsunami's reach also varied widely — in some places it flooded inland areas more than 12 metres above sea level.

The US Geological Survey team says the information can be used to plan rebuilding in the aftermath of the disaster, and to calibrate models of tsunami behaviour against field observations.

♦ <http://walrus.wr.usgs.gov/tsunami>

Museum drops plans to clone extinct marsupial

Sydney The Tasmanian tiger is to remain extinct — for now, at least.

Plans to resurrect the thylacine (*Thylacinus cynocephalus*), a dog-like marsupial, using DNA samples from a preserved specimen were abandoned by the Australian Museum in Sydney on 16 February. The museum says the samples are too degraded to be used, but



Lost stripes: preserved DNA samples of the Tasmanian tiger are too degraded for cloning.

advocates of the project say they will explore other options.

The last-known thylacine died in captivity in 1936. But in 1999, the museum's director Michael Archer championed an initiative to clone the species using a related marsupial, the Tasmanian devil, as a surrogate mother. The proposal generated considerable scepticism in scientific circles.

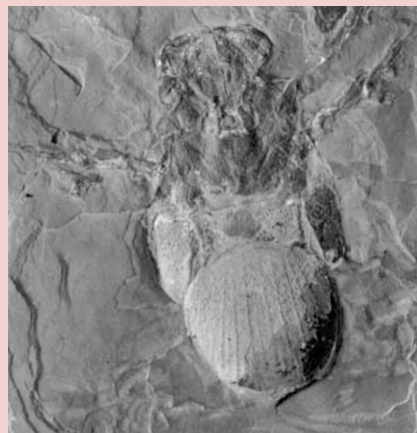
Archer, who became dean of science at the University of New South Wales in Sydney

Biggest-ever spider recast as a sea scorpion

London A giant 'tarantula' that lived some 300 million years ago is not, after all, the largest spider that ever walked the Earth. It is a sea scorpion, scientists reported last week.

The fossil of *Megarachne servinei* (pictured), which had a half-metre leg span, was discovered in 1970 in Argentina by Ernesto Servine, an amateur collector; it was classified as a spider by Argentinian palaeontologist Mario Hünicken. The creature has an entry in the *Guinness World Records*, but doubts have long existed about the classification.

Servine kept the fossil in a bank vault, and scientists only had the opportunity to re-examine it after he died. Paul Selden, a palaeontologist at the University of Manchester, UK, has now declared it to be a sea scorpion after comparing it last year with a newly discovered specimen from the same locality



and with *Woodwardopterus*, a sea-scorpion species found in Scotland.

"It took a long time to get to see it — now we're happy," said Selden.

last year, says he is disappointed by the decision. "But I and other colleagues remain interested, and I don't think the project will die because the museum can't proceed," he adds.

Women lack support, not drive, study finds

London A survey of scientists has cast doubt on the notion that female scientists fail to reach top positions because they are less ambitious than men.

The study, which analysed results from more than 6,500 UK scientists, found that women in research institutes have higher career aspirations than men. But when it comes to applying for group leader and senior management positions, women get significantly less encouragement and support from tenured researchers and department heads, the authors said on 18 February.

The research was carried out by the Athena Project, a government-sponsored scheme designed to advance women's careers in science, and the University of East Anglia in Norwich.

"The sad fact is that those further down the scale are still not rising to more senior positions with the same frequency as men, despite a clear desire to do so," says Caroline Fox, Athena's programme manager.

♦ www.athenaproject.org.uk

Governor attacks state backing for stem-cell work

Washington Moves enabling the state of Massachusetts to become a supporter of stem-cell research are coming under attack.

The state's lawmakers are considering a proposal that would permit researchers to clone embryos in order to produce

stem cells. The development would add momentum to plans to conduct similar research at the new, privately funded Stem Cell Institute at Harvard University (see *Nature* 428, 8; 2004). But these plans were thrown into doubt on 10 February, when state governor Mitt Romney said he opposes such practices and would like to ban them.

Romney's statements have prompted angry criticism from some quarters. Observers suggest that his real motivation is to position himself favourably with the national Republican Party, which opposes the creation of embryos for research.

Super sub is frozen out after failing to return

London A pioneering robot submarine has become trapped in a dark and cold ocean grave — under an Antarctic ice sheet.

Autosub, operated by the Southampton Oceanography Centre, is a veteran of almost 400 missions spanning the past four years. Earlier this month, it set a landmark for marine exploration by journeying under the permanent Antarctic ice sheet to investigate rising sea levels (see *Nature* 430, 955; 2004). But the vessel has failed to return from a repeat mission that began last week. Its owners said on 18 February that the sub is trapped 17 kilometres from the edge of an ice shelf and probably cannot be recovered.

The 7-metre-long robot, powered by some 5,000 household batteries, is programmed to measure the thickness of the ice sheet and to collect water samples. A replacement is under construction and should be ready by September.