

Plant biologist named as Australia's science adviser

The Australian government has appointed plant researcher Jim Peacock as the nation's new chief scientist. He replaces Robin Batterham, whose reign was marred by allegations of conflicts of interest, as he worked part-time for mining giant Rio Tinto while advising the government on energy and climate issues (see *Nature* 435, 398; 2005).

The position is part-time, something that Peacock had previously criticized in his role as president of the Australian Academy of Science (AAS). "Our position is still that it's such an important job that it should be a full-time job," says Sue Serjeantson, executive secretary of the AAS. Peacock will spend the rest of his time conducting research at the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation.

Environmental groups are concerned about Peacock's enthusiasm for genetically modified crops and for encouraging debate about nuclear energy.

Kurt Lambeck, a geophysicist at the Australian National University in Canberra, will replace Peacock as the AAS president when his term ends in May.

EMBO helps life scientists set up labs in Europe

The Heidelberg-based European Molecular Biology Organization (EMBO) has launched a funding scheme to help talented life scientists set up laboratories in EMBO member states whose science bases are relatively undeveloped. Croatia, the Czech Republic, Poland, Portugal and Turkey

have so far signed up to the programme.

EMBO will select winners of what will be known as the EMBO Strategic Development Installation Grants, and enrol them in its Young Investigator Programme, a sort of finishing school for elite biologists.

Awardees will receive €50,000 (US\$60,000) per year. EMBO is asking host institutes to commit to employing scientists more permanently when the grant period — probably three to five years — has ended.

Japanese researcher finds synthetic route to Tamiflu

A University of Tokyo researcher says he has made a synthetic version of Tamiflu, thought to be the most effective drug against avian influenza.

The Swiss company Roche, which makes Tamiflu using a plant extract, has been unable to meet the huge demand from governments that are stockpiling the drug as avian influenza spreads.

"This will make it possible to have stable production," says Masakatsu Shibasaki, the biochemist who devised the new production method. It uses a readily accessible chemical — 1,4-cyclohexadiene — instead of the plant extract. Shibasaki says the product is exactly the same as Tamiflu, and Tokyo University is beginning to negotiate with Roche over a possible collaboration. A representative from Chugai Pharmaceutical, the company's Japanese subsidiary, says that Roche is aware of Shibasaki's announcement, but that the company cannot release details of any negotiations.

Tokyo University applied for a patent on 23 February. Shibasaki will present his results at the Pharmaceutical Society of Japan's annual meeting on 28–30 March.



Looking up: \$2.2 million could help researchers find and protect the ivory-billed woodpecker.

Friends of lost woodpecker hope for cash windfall

US officials are seeking \$2.2 million to help conserve the 'rediscovered' ivory-billed woodpecker (*Campephilus principalis*), even though there have been no new confirmed sightings of the bird.

Since a group led by ornithologists at Cornell University made the first claimed sighting for more than 50 years last spring, teams have unsuccessfully searched the Big Woods region of Arkansas for confirmation (see *Nature* 437, 188–190; 2005). Over the past winter, birdwatchers reported a half-dozen possible sightings, but there have been no photographs or other solid evidence. Sceptics of the discovery dismiss the sighting claims as "faith-based ornithology".

The budget request to Congress calls for \$1.6 million to develop the recovery plan for the bird; \$400,000 for searching the lower Mississippi River Valley; and \$200,000 for law-enforcement support.

Dutch universities ditch reported Nazi collaborator

The University of Utrecht in the Netherlands has dropped 1936 chemistry Nobel laureate Peter Debye from the name of its nanomaterials institute. The move follows reports that the former national hero had actively supported Nazi policy in the 1930s.

In addition, the University of Maastricht has dropped Debye's name from its international science prize, which is funded by the Edmond Hustinx Foundation. The university is also now planning to produce a monograph investigating the life of Debye.

The reports of Debye's Nazi links were made in *Einstein in the Netherlands*, a Dutch-language book published in January. Science writer Sybe Rispens found evidence suggesting that Debye had, for example, expelled Jews from the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Physics in Berlin when he was its director.

Institute that cloned Dolly heads for pastures new

The centre that created Dolly the sheep could be set to close.

The Roslin Institute near Edinburgh, UK, made the headlines when its staff unveiled Dolly (pictured) in 1997. The creation of the world's first mammal to be cloned from an adult cell pushed debate about the ethics of cloning onto the public stage.

Under plans announced on 24 February, much of the institute's science will merge with efforts at other local research organizations and move to a new facility, the Edinburgh Bioscience Research Centre, largely funded by the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council. The future of the Roslin site is yet to be decided.

Roslin's director, Harry Griffin, has campaigned for the move, saying the merger will save costs and create a critical mass of researchers. The move could be complete by 2009, he says.



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