

## NASA climbs back on board dark-energy mission

NASA is renewing its support for a space mission to investigate dark energy, the mysterious force that could make up two-thirds of the energy density of the Universe.

The Supernova Acceleration Probe (SNAP) was first proposed by scientists at the US Department of Energy's Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory in California in 1999. In 2003, NASA joined forces on the project, but pulled out a year later when President George W. Bush announced plans to redirect NASA towards exploration of the Moon and Mars (*Nature* 427, 667; 2004).

On 9 August NASA said it will re-enter SNAP by supporting a concept study, which will also provide a cost estimate, likely to be several hundred million dollars. "I'm optimistic," says Saul Perlmutter at Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory, a principal investigator on the SNAP collaboration.

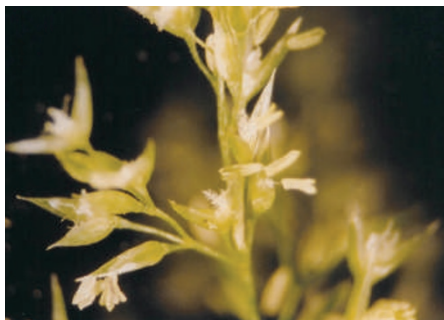
But the die is not yet cast. NASA also announced plans to study concepts for two smaller missions to study dark energy: ADEPT from Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland, and DESTINY from the National Optical Astronomy Observatory in Tucson, Arizona.

## Transgenic grass strain escapes into the wild

A transgenic strain of grass bred for golf courses has spread from test plots and established itself in the wild, researchers say. Ecologists warn that the hardy, fast-spreading strain could overwhelm native species in the northwestern United States.

Scientists working for the US Environmental Protection Agency in Corvallis, Oregon, say they have found the plant, known as creeping bentgrass (*Agrostis stolonifera*), 3.8 kilometres away from experimental plots. Seeds and pollen have been dispersed by the wind, they report in a forthcoming issue of *Molecular Ecology*.

The strain, bred by horticulture supplier Scotts, in Marysville, Ohio, is engineered to be resistant to the herbicide Roundup. This



The grass is always greener: a transgenic strain of creeping bentgrass has escaped from test plots.

## Student's organic design gives lab a cell structure

It's an opportunity any architect would die for. But it fell to Sloan Kulper, an architecture student at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), whose interest in biology led him to sit in on the lectures of Shuguang Zhang, an MIT biomedical engineer.

When Zhang was asked to advise on a new nanobiomedical institute at his alma mater, Sichuan University, he encouraged Kulper to design a building for it, drawing on the biology he had learned. The resulting cell-shaped building has passed through technical review. Its interior is packed with biological references, from a crystal-shaped lecture theatre to handrails jointed with nucleosome shapes. Zhang says the building would be too expensive in Europe or the United States, but will cost no more than US\$10 million in China. He is still seeking funds.



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will make it hard to eradicate from areas where other grasses are grown and managed with herbicides, warn ecologists.

## Animal-rights groups force researcher to quit studies

Chalk one up for the animal-rights activists. In a 4 August e-mail to activists titled "You win", Dario Ringach, a neurophysiologist at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), announced that he would cease all research on animals immediately. "Please don't bother my family any more," he added.

Ringach had been harried by activists protesting against his work on visual processing in macaques. He gave up after an incident on 30 June in which Lynn Fairbanks, another primate researcher at UCLA, found an unexploded home-made bomb on her front porch.

UCLA has defended the animal research it hosts, arguing that it helps to improve human health and society.

But Jean Barnes, head of the Primate Freedom Project of Fayetteville, Georgia, is not satisfied. Barnes refuses to take Ringach's home address off the Primate Freedom Project website until he apologizes.

## Gates gift to Global Fund shames governments

On the eve of the XVI International AIDS Conference, held in Toronto this week, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation stepped up pressure on governments by pledging the largest non-governmental donation yet to the Geneva-based Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

The Gates Foundation said on 9 August that it will give US\$500 million over five years on top of the \$150 million it has already donated to the fund. Since 2002,

the Global Fund has provided \$5.5 billion, mostly from governments, to 132 countries.

The fund's executive director, Richard Feachem, says it still needs \$500 million to finance its next round of grants in November. Announcements of new commitments to the Global Fund may come during the AIDS meeting. Paul Zeitz, executive director of the non-profit organization Global AIDS Alliance, based in Washington DC, estimates that the Global Fund will require \$11 billion per year by 2010.

## Electronic ark to hold all known animal species

It's being called a 'genome project' for zoology, the field's equivalent to the Moon landing. ZooBank, an online database of all known animal species, was launched on 10 August ([www.zoobank.org](http://www.zoobank.org)).

The database was established to end the confusion caused by information on new species being published in different journals (see *Nature* 437, 477; 2005). It already contains details of the 1.5 million species compiled as the electronic archive of the past 150 years of the *Zoological Record*. With the backing of the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature (ICZN), ZooBank will be the official registry for new species.

"ZooBank will revolutionize the way in which those people using scientific animal names can work," says Andrew Polaszek, a taxonomist at the Natural History Museum in London and executive secretary of the ICZN.

### Correction

The News story "Wildlife caught in crossfire of US immigration battle" (*Nature* 442, 338-339; 2006) incorrectly ascribed the research on counting illegal immigrant trails in the Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge to Peter Morrison and the Pacific Biodiversity Institute. The research was actually done by the refuge's Dan Cohan.