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FDA urged to assess cloned animals like drugs

Several advocacy groups last week petitioned the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to regulate cloned animals as "new animal drugs" under the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act, the benchmark law governing the approval of ordinary drugs.

The groups argue that the law's broad definition of 'drug' supports their claim that a clone is a drug, and thus that investigations into its safety should be the same as those used for drugs.

"The FDA has had this issue before them for several years now, and hasn't acted," says Jaydee Hanson, a spokesman for the Center for Food Safety in Washington DC. The petitioners are also asking the FDA to make compulsory its 2003 request to companies not to sell foods from cloned animals.

In 2003, the FDA issued a draft risk assessment which concluded that foods from normal, healthy clones "do not appear to pose increased food consumption risks". But the agency also said that additional data on the issue would increase its confidence in this conclusion.

Big-headed mouse found on Cyprus is a new species

Genetic tests have confirmed that an unusual type of mouse found on Cyprus is indeed a new species, it was announced last week. The mice were first noted in 2004 for having a normal body size but bigger heads and teeth than mouse species in mainland Europe.

The new species, *Mus cypriacus*, was found by Thomas Cucchi of Durham University, UK, and colleagues. It is believed to have diverged from its mainland counterpart, *Mus macedonicus*, in the Middle Pleistocene era, between 650,000 and 350,000 years ago (T. Cucchi *et al.* *Zootaxa* 1241, 1–36; 2006).

Keith Dobney, a bioarchaeologist and colleague of Cucchi's at Durham University,



Keep your eyes open: the discovery of a mouse raises hopes of finding more mammal species.

Tortoises not so lonesome on Galapagos island

The remote island of Pinta in the Galapagos archipelago is to be the setting for a conservation move unprecedented in the history of these iconic islands.

Last week, researchers announced that 100 giant tortoises from Española — another island in the Galapagos — will be tagged with microchips and set free on Pinta's volcanic slopes later this year. They will replace Pinta's own subspecies of tortoise, only one of which survives: the celebrated Lonesome George (pictured), who was discovered and taken into captivity on the island of Santa Cruz nearly 35 years ago.

It will be the first time conservationists in the Galapagos have used 'taxon substitution' — using one taxon as a stand-in for another. The move should restore some balance to Pinta's ecology and strengthen efforts to conserve the Española tortoise, a subspecies that at one time was down to just 15 individuals but is now back in the thousands.



notes that there may be still more new species to discover in Europe. "Perhaps not large animals," he says, "but there certainly is a chance of finding these small mammals. This one was right under everyone's noses."

Cell biologist takes on PNAS editorship

The *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* has named a new editor-in-chief, Randy Schekman, a cell and developmental biologist at the University of California, Berkeley.

Schekman replaces Nicholas Cozzarelli, also of Berkeley, who died of lymphoma in March after editing the journal for 12 years.

Originally trained as a biochemist, Schekman says he hopes during his four-year term to broaden the research topics published (particularly from the physical sciences), "tighten up" the review and decision-making process for articles, and compete more with other major journals for manuscripts.

"The biggest challenge is to make sure the journal attracts the most important manuscripts," he says. "It is a big job."

Pressure group pushes for 'nano-hazard' symbol

A campaigning group that has previously called for a moratorium on nanotechnology research is now pushing for the creation of a 'nano-hazard' symbol. The ETC Group, based in Ottawa, Canada, last week launched a competition to select a design.

One suggestion already on display at www.etcgroup.org/nanohazard is a carbon 'buckyball' inside a yellow warning triangle — resembling the 'nuclear hazard' sign.

Ann Dowling, who chaired the working

group on nanotechnology of Britain's Royal Society and Royal Academy of Engineering, notes that much nanotech work poses no new safety risks, so "a universal 'nano-hazard' symbol would be wholly inappropriate". But she acknowledges concerns about the safety of 'free' nanoparticles: "We do need a discussion about labelling products containing these substances so that consumers can choose whether to use them or not."

A longer life when matter meets antimatter

Annihilation has been delayed by allowing a chemical reaction between matter and antimatter to take place in a vacuum.

Protonium, which consists of a proton and an antiproton, is the product of a reaction between a hydrogen molecular ion (which has two protons and one electron) and an antiproton. Researchers normally make protonium by smashing these two molecules together at high speed, and the resulting atom usually annihilates itself almost immediately.

But a different method honed by the ATHENA atom-smashing collaboration based at CERN in Geneva has produced protonium that lives for a millionth, rather than just a trillionth, of a second (N. Zurlo *et al. Phys. Rev. Lett.* 97, 153401; 2006). This longer life was made possible by allowing the hydrogen ion and the antiproton to meet in a vacuum. As a result, they were attracted by their electronic charges, as occurs in a normal chemical reaction.

Correction

Our News Feature on decadal surveys (*Nature* 443, 386-389; 2006) cut a year off the GLAST satellite's development time; it will be launched in late 2007, not late 2006.

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