



STORIES BY SUBJECT
 Find all our space and physics news online
www.nature.com/news/archive/subject/index.html

NASA, JHU-APL, SOUTHWEST RESEARCH INST.

about 100,000 stars in a particular patch of sky in the hope of measuring such transits, something France's Corot satellite is already doing on a smaller scale. However, the stars Kepler will be looking at are almost all too distant for follow-up observations that might characterize its discoveries.

The other approach — making hyperaccurate measurements of a star's position — is the goal of NASA's US\$1.85-billion Space Interferometry Mission, or SIM, a bone of contention between the agency, which has sought to cut its funding, and its fans in the astronomical community. Zlatan Tsvetanov, the NASA programme scientist for SIM, says the astro-comb technique does not replace the SIM technique "by any means". But a forthcoming exoplanet report, commissioned by a National Science Foundation advisory committee, says that the number-one priority is finding another Earth in the most cost-effective way. If discovering Earth-sized planets with a technology that cost less than a million dollars really works, it may be hard for billion-dollar space missions to compete. ■

Eric Hand

See Q&A, page xiii, and News & Views, page 538.

SNAPSHOT Flirty in pink

Lustily trashing some hollow-stemmed matting grass, this pink Amazonian river dolphin (*Inia geoffrensis*) is working it down the waterway in Mamirauá, a flooded rainforest reserve in Brazil. It's almost an exclusively male practice, this brandishing of grasses, sticks or clay. It is thought to be a courtship ritual, although no researcher has seen the dolphins mating, despite more than 13,000 hours of observation. If so, it places dolphins, with humans, chimps and birds, among the few animals that use objects as a flirting device.

Anna Petherick



A. MARTIN