

## EVENTS

### Telescope progress

The first of 64 huge antennas that will eventually make up the world's biggest radio telescope opened for business in South Africa on 27 March. The full array of the 19.5-metre antennas, which will make up the MeerKAT telescope under construction in the Karoo region, will be operational by 2017. The project is the first stage of the much larger planned Square Kilometer Array (SKA) of radio telescopes that will be located in South Africa and Australia. The first stage of SKA's Australian component will add 60 dishes to an existing 36-dish array in Western Australia.

### Ebola spreads

An outbreak of the Ebola virus that began in southern Guinea has reached the capital, Conakry, and has moved into neighbouring Liberia. Guinean health officials have reported 78 deaths out of 122 suspected or confirmed cases, the World Health Organization (WHO) said on 30 March. Four people have died in Liberia among seven possible and confirmed cases. All of the Liberian cases were contracted in Guinea, said the WHO.

## NUMBER CRUNCH

# 7 million

The number of people who died in 2012 as a result of exposure to air pollution, according to a report released by the World Health Organization on 25 March. The figure more than doubles previous estimates. Air pollution is now the largest single environmental health risk, the agency says.



TIM WATERS/SEA SHEPHERD AUSTRALIA/NEWSCOM

## Court halts Japan's whale hunt

Japan's Antarctic whale hunt is not scientific and so must be halted, ruled the International Court of Justice on 31 March in The Hague in the Netherlands. Japan has maintained that it catches whales for research — which is allowed under international law — but opponents say that the actions amount to commercial whaling, which is effectively banned. The court found that the research programme

has produced limited scientific findings, and that Japan provided a weak explanation for the number of animals it killed. It is unclear whether Japan will now cease its hunts. Whaling elsewhere continues, for example in Norway and Iceland, which oppose the ban and do not claim a scientific justification for their whale hunts. See [go.nature.com/rlu3iz](http://go.nature.com/rlu3iz) for more.

## POLICY

### Cut threat to health

The United States' contribution to global health research and development is being undermined by funding restrictions to the US National Institutes of Health (NIH). The warning comes in a 27 March report from the Washington DC-based Global Health Technologies Coalition, which represents more than 25 non-profit organizations. NIH funding cuts have forced the closure of clinical trials examining a new tuberculosis drug and the scaling back of programmes providing poor countries with treatments for HIV/AIDS and tools to control malaria.

### Water protection

Wetlands and streams in the United States are set to be given greater protection under the Clean Water Act. On 25 March, the Environmental Protection Agency and the US Army Corps of Engineers sought to clarify the scope of the act, proposing that wetlands and streams specifically should be protected. Environmental groups have been calling for such clarification for a decade. The proposal is open for public comment until the end of June.

### Methane plan

The US government published on 28 March a national strategy to cut methane

emissions, as part of the Climate Action Plan that President Barack Obama announced last June. The strategy includes proposals for updated standards, set to be issued this summer, to cut emissions of the potent greenhouse gas from landfills. The government also announced a forthcoming Biogas Roadmap that will outline voluntary strategies to reduce methane emissions from the dairy industry by 25% by 2020.

### Warming world

Global warming is already affecting ecosystems across Earth, from freshwater systems to urban environments, and its effects are poised to increase in

NASA/JAXA the coming decades, said the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change on 31 March. The report was the second instalment of the panel's fifth climate assessment, focusing on global warming's impacts and the need for humans to adapt to a changing climate. The last instalment of the report is scheduled for release on 13 April. See page 7 for more.

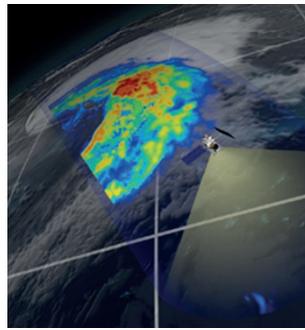
## Acidic waters

The US government should establish a national programme to coordinate research on ocean acidification, a federal advisory group said on 26 March. Developing technologies to monitor the pH of the ocean and how it affects marine food webs are among the goals that the programme should pursue, said the Interagency Working Group on Ocean Acidification. The group warned that the chemistry of the world's oceans is changing faster now than at any other time in the past 20 million years.

### RESEARCH

## Cyclone captured

Bands of heavy rain stand out in red in this image of a cyclone in the northwest Pacific Ocean on 10 March, one of the first glimpses from the US–Japanese Global Precipitation Measurement



(GPM) Core Observatory satellite. GPM officials released the images on 25 March, less than four weeks after the mission launched. The cyclone pictured shows off the GPM's ability to measure a variety of precipitation in a single storm, including snowflakes. Rain is shown in red, yellow and light blue, and snow in dark blue (upper left).

## Drug discovery

Two planned UK research centres will bring together academia and industry to discover medicines. The Centre for Therapeutic Target Validation, announced on 27 March, will emerge from a collaboration between drug company GlaxoSmithKline, headquartered in London, the Wellcome Trust Sanger Institute and the European Bioinformatics Institute, both in Hinxton, UK. On 31 March, the UK Medical Research Council announced

a separate collaboration with London-based drug company AstraZeneca to open the Centre for Lead Discovery in 2016, aimed at better understanding diseases.

## Misconduct finding

A committee investigating problems with two high-profile stem-cell papers says that lead researcher Haruko Obokata manipulated data in an intentionally misleading fashion. Obokata, of the RIKEN Center for Developmental Biology in Kobe, Japan, is guilty of scientific misconduct, said the RIKEN-scientist-led committee at a press conference on 1 April. Obokata was not present, but said in a written statement that she planned to appeal. The papers, which claimed that a simple method reprogrammed mature cells into an embryonic state, were published in *Nature* on 30 January. See [go.nature.com/cltkcg](http://go.nature.com/cltkcg) for more.

## Site selection

European scientists have picked four potential landing sites for a rover designed to search for life on Mars. The ExoMars rover, part of a joint mission of the European Space Agency (ESA) and Russia's space agency, Roscosmos, is scheduled to land on the red planet in early 2019. At

## COMING UP

### 3 APRIL

The Sentinel-1A satellite launches. It is the first of two satellites in the initial phase of Europe's Copernicus global-monitoring programme, and carries an advanced radar to provide all-weather, 24-hour images of Earth.

[go.nature.com/ijm6cd](http://go.nature.com/ijm6cd)

### 5–9 APRIL

The American Association for Cancer Research meets in San Diego, California, to discuss and celebrate progress in turning basic-science discoveries into treatments.

[go.nature.com/c1mtj3](http://go.nature.com/c1mtj3)

a workshop on 27 March at ESA's European Space Astronomy Centre near Madrid, four sites — Hypanis Vallis, Oxia Planum, Mawrth Vallis and Oxia Palus — emerged as favourites from eight proposed sites. An expert group will now consider the proposals before announcing a formal shortlist in June. See page 19 for more.

### AWARDS

## Maths prize

The Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters has awarded the 2014 Abel Prize to Yakov Sinai, a Russian-born mathematical physicist at Princeton University in New Jersey. Sinai is most famous for his work in the field of complex dynamical systems, which includes chaos theory. The Abel Prize is one of the most prestigious prizes in mathematics and comes with a monetary award of 6 million Norwegian kroner (US\$1 million). See [go.nature.com/ttwwwc](http://go.nature.com/ttwwwc) for more.

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## TREND WATCH

Autism diagnoses rose to 1 in 68 US children (1.2 million in total) in 2010, up from 1 in 110 in 2006, according to a report released on 27 March by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, Georgia. Nearly half of the children who are diagnosed with autism have average or above average intelligence, up from one-third in 2002. It is unclear whether more-intelligent children are developing the condition, or whether they are being diagnosed more often than in the past (see *Nature* 479, 22–24; 2011).

## AUTISM DIAGNOSES RISING

Almost 1.5% of US children are now diagnosed with autism, according to data from 11 regions in the United States.

