TOUCHING BASE

QUESTIONS? THOUGHTS? IDEAS?
e-mail us at ngfeedback@natureny.com

In good company

Last month, The Company of Biologists announced that starting in January 2004, the journals that they publish, *Development*, *Journal of Cell Science* and *The Journal of Experimental Biology*, will offer their authors an 'open access' option. Authors will be able to choose whether they would like their papers published in the usual fashion, accessible to subscribers, or as author-funded open access papers that will be free to all through the internet. Currently, papers published in their journals are freely available for six months after publication. The company has generously offered to partially subsidize the author charges, at least initially. The publishing experiment will proceed for a one-year trial period, at which point TCOB will assess whether their experiment in 'hybrid publishing' will continue or choose sides in the ongoing debate over the economic validity of an open access publishing model. *MS*

UNESCO revisits human genetics

As *Nature Genetics* goes to press, the 32nd session of the general conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization is meeting in Paris. UNESCO has been in the news recently thanks to the official return of the US to the organization, with First Lady Laura Bush leading the US delegation and receiving a much photographed kiss on the hand from French President Jacques Chirac. In addition to a laundry list of issues on world affairs, the meeting has on its agenda the state of human genetics. In 1998, UNESCO issued its Universal Declaration on the Human Genome and Human Rights, which addressed the potential impact of human genome sequencing efforts. This month, delegates have been examining a draft international declaration that aims to define ethical principles governing the collection, processing, storage and use of human genetic data. Most of the points outlined in the interim UNESCO press release seem unexceptional, covering the usual concerns over respect for human dignity and rights, confidentiality and consent. Like the rest of UNESCO's recommendations, the degree to which it has any influence on policy will depend largely on whether member states pass appropriate legislation. ***AP***

Mate preference Ig Nobel

Winning the Ig Nobel prize in the interdisciplinary category this year was the study "Chickens Prefer Beautiful Humans" (*Human Nature* **13**, 383–389; 2002) by Stefano Ghirlanda, Liselotte Jansson and Magnus Enquist. The Ig Nobel prizes are awarded annually at a ceremony in Boston for achievements that "cannot or should not be reproduced". For their prize-winning work, the Swedish researchers trained chickens to peck pictures of humans that they preferred. When offered a new selection of faces, the chickens preferred the more attractive faces, as judged by university students. How these findings can be integrated with last year's winning work for the Ig Nobel in biology, "Courtship Behaviour of Ostriches Towards Humans Under Farming Conditions in Britain" (*Br. Poult. Sci.* **39**, 477–481; 1998), remains unclear. Be assured that we will continue to monitor closely the active field of avian-human attraction. DG

Touching Base written by David Gresham, Alan Packer and Michael Stebbins

Mutant of the Month

We set our gaze to murky water this month to bring you the *Volvox carteri regA* mutant, our November MoM. This relatively simple species of green algae is a hollow ball of cells up to 3 mm in diameter. It consists of two types of cells, a monolayer of small somatic cells at the surface and a few large asexual reproductive (gonidia) just beneath the surface layer. Each somatic cell has two flagella that face outward and provide the means to spin through fresh water ponds. Young-adult *regA* mutants (left) appear to have developed normally, producing the usual large number of small somatic cells and a few large gonidia. By the second day of life (right), however, the somatic cells fail to senesce, instead enlarging and redifferentiating as fully functional gonidia. The *regA* gene encodes a transcriptional repressor exclusively expressed in somatic cells. It is hypothesized that RegA acts to block reproductive activity in somatic cells by blocking transcription of nuclear genes required for chloroplast biogenesis. *MS*

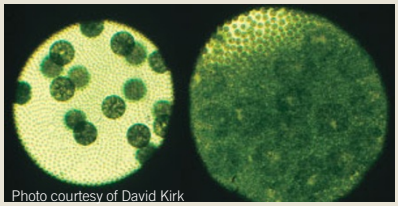


Photo courtesy of David Kirk

Annual Nobel Haiku

How do they get in?
Rather, how do they get out?
Channels! to Stockholm

Nobel bobble

The holidays are just around the corner, and we know just what to get for the scientist who has everything but a lifetime grant. The James D. Watson bobble head doll, of course. Clad in khaki with double helix in hand, Jimmy D will always be there to give you the nod of approval. The dolls are available for $21.95 each (including shipping within the US) at http://www.scivon.com. You can also get one free from the Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory Microarray Shared Resource with any order of five or more microarrays (http://www.cshl.edu/msr). *MS*

Erratum: TOUCHING BASE: In good company

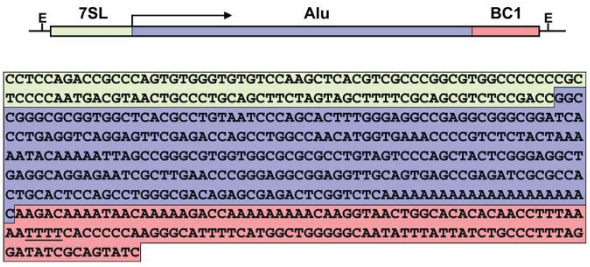
M Stebbins
Nat. Genet. **35, 209 (2003).**

The third sentence should read, "Currently, papers published in their journals become freely available six months after publication."

Corrigendum: Human Alu element retrotransposition induced by genotoxic stress

C R Hagan, R F Sheffield & C M Rudin
Nat. Genet. **35, 219–220 (2003).**

In the Supplementary Information initially published online, the sequence of the Alu construct in Supplementary Figure 1 was incorrect. A corrected version of Supplementary Figure 1 appears below.



CCTCCAGACCGCCCAGTGTGGGTGTGTCCAAGCTCACGTCGCCCGGCGTGGCCCCCCCGC
TCCCCAATGACGTAACTGCCCTGCAGCTTCTAGTAGCTTTTCGCAGCGTCTCCGACCGGC
CGGGCGCGGTGGCTCACGCCTGTAATCCCAGCACTTTGGGAGGCCGAGGCGGGCGGATCA
CCTGAGGTCAGGAGTTCGAGACCAGCCTGGCCAACATGGTGAAACCCCGTCTCTACTAAA
AATACAAAAATTAGCCGGGCGTGGTGGCGCGCGCCTGTAGTCCCAGCTACTCGGGAGGCT
GAGGCAGGAGAATCGCTTGAACCCGGGAGGCGGAGGTTGCAGTGAGCCGAGATCGCGCCA
CTGCACTCCAGCCTGGGCGACAGAGCGAGACTCGGTCTCAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA
CAAGACAAAATAACAAAAAGACCAAAAAAAAACAAGGTAACTGGCACACACAACCTTTAA
AATTTTCACCCCCAAGGGCATTTTCATGGCTGGGGGCAATATTTATTATCTGCCCTTTAG
GATATCGCAGTATC