Briefing:

Madagascar Is the Focus of Habitat Project

Following 10 days of discussions recently in Moscow, U.S. and Soviet scientists representing seven national conservation organizations have agreed on a collaborative effort to tackle the problem of global deforestation. "Both sides agree that in view of a long period of global handwringing on the issues, a concerted effort must now begin," says Brent Blackwelder of the Environmental Policy Institute, which led the U.S. delegation. The initiative plans to focus on a pilot project in Madagascar, whose highly unusual fauna and flora are facing imminent devastation.

If the proposal finds U.S. and Soviet government support, it will encompass investigations into both "sustainable use and protection of tropical forest resources." The Madagascar government is said to be interested in exploring solutions to the dangers of habitat destruction that are compatible with sustained econmic growth. Scientists hope that progress with this project could become a model for other countries in the developing world that face similar problems.

Discussions of strategy among the seven sponsoring conservation organizations are expected to continue in Washington in the fall. ■ **R.L.**

Overhaul Recommended for British Geology

A committee of British geologists has suggested that university geology departments should be organized into a national, three-tiered structure. Between 10 and 12 universities would be identified as centers of excellence and provided with the equipment needed to remain first-class research centers; a second layer would teach undergraduates up to honors level; and the third would be restricted to teaching the first 2 years of geology degree courses.

The proposal for a three-tiered structure has been made in a report prepared for the University Grants Committee (UGC) by a review panel headed by Ron Oxburgh, professor of mineralogy and petrology at the University of Cambridge. It is the first explicit plan for focusing research resources on a limited number of universities, although pressures for such a change have been growing for several years in light of continued stress on Britain's research budget (*Science*, 1 May, p. 512).

If the proposals for geology are approved by the UGC next month, all requests for support will be considered by regional committees before being submitted to the UGC itself. The full system would come into operation over the next 2 years, and the UGC suggests in an introduction to the report that the proposals could serve as a blueprint for the reorganization of other disciplines in British universities, "particularly chemistry and physics." ■ **D.D.**

Congress to Weigh Animal Patents

Protests surrounding the 3 April decision by the Patent and Trademark Office to allow animals to be patented have spurred Congress to step into the fray. Senator Mark Hatfield (R–OR), asked Donald J. Quigg, commissioner of the patent office, to refrain from issuing any patents on higher life forms. The senator is drafting legislation that "would effectively rescind" the Patent Office's animal patents decision (*Science*, 10 April, p. 144). There are an estimated 15 animal patents now pending, but no action is expected on any application for 3 months.

House hearings on the animal patent decision also are planned for the second week of June. The issue is being taken up by Representative Robert W. Kastenmeier (D–WI), chairman of the subcommittee on courts, civil liberties, and the administration of justice. Kastenmeier, aides say, is interested in examining the adequacy of patent law structure for dealing with animal and plant inventions derived from recombinant DNA technology. ■ **M.C.**

IBM to Give Cornell a $20-Million Computer

Cornell University is about to acquire a new $20-million supercomputer system, courtesy of International Business Machines (IBM). Donation of the system, which IBM describes as the world's first mass-produced supercomputer, is part of a $30-million commitment IBM made to Cornell's Theory Center when it was founded in 1985 with a $21.9-million grant from the National Science Foundation. The arrangement provides Cornell with state-of-the-art equipment free, while IBM researchers gain from constant interaction with Cornell faculty members. The new machine, the IBM 3090–600E, has about 60% more processing power than Cornell's current supercomputer.

A year ago, Cornell was set to get another new supercomputer, thanks to a $10-million amendment to the Defense Department's budget that was proposed on the Senate floor by Senator Mark Hatfield (R–OR). The machine would have come from Floating Point Systems, which is based in Oregon. However, Cornell president Frank Rhodes declined to accept the funds since the award would have bypassed normal review procedures. Rhodes' stand was greeted with some cynicism at the time because Cornell had already submitted a proposal to the Defense Department for such a machine and many people expected it would be funded. However, the machine has gone to Los Alamos National Laboratory. ■ **C.N.**

A Warning on Oil Imports

Energy ministers from 21 of the world's leading industrialized nations issued a warning last week that the current low price of crude petroleum could, by encouraging consumption and discouraging exploration, eventually lead to a new energy crisis. Meeting as members of the Paris-based International Energy Agency, the ministers agreed that this threat made it necessary to give a new emphasis to energy conservation, to building up strategic reserves of oil, and to developing new sources of energy.

A staff analysis prepared for the ministers' meeting—the first since July 1985—suggested that the drop in exploration could enable countries belonging to the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries to increase their output from 17 to 22 millions barrels a day over the next 2 years. By the end of the century, the report suggests, countries belonging to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development could be relying on oil imports for 63% of their energy supplies, compared to 50% today. ■ **D.D.**

Vaccine Test Okayed

The Department of Agriculture (USDA) has approved a field test of a genetically engineered pseudorabies vaccine. Developed by the Upjohn Company and licensed to Diamond Scientific Companies, the vaccine is to be tested on about 380 swine beginning in early June. The companies have not disclosed exactly where the tests will take place, but say they have obtained approval to test the product in Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri, and Nebraska.

The vaccine was engineered by deleting two genes. Animals vaccinated with the product can be distinguished from those naturally infected with the disease and those vaccinated with other vaccines, according to USDA officials. ■ **M.C.**