

Briefings

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Wistar Cleared by Argentina

The Wistar Institute has been vindicated of alleged wrongdoing in 1987 field tests of a cattle rabies vaccine in Argentina, according to the Pan American Health Organization. The allegations have complicated the institute's efforts to win approval for field tests of the vaccine in South Carolina and Virginia.

The institute got into hot water with the Argentine government when it tested the genetically engineered vaccine without informing officials in advance. The government charged that Wistar had failed to take proper precautions to protect technicians administering the vaccine to the animals, with the result that they had developed antibodies to it, suggesting that their health was at risk.

But in July the Pan American Health Organization, which conducted the tests with Wistar, notified Senator Ernest Hollings (D-SC) that an Argentine government investigation has concluded that the vaccine's carrier virus was not transmitted to the animal caretakers after all.

Wistar official Warren Cheston said, "It removes a cloud over the project."

Gupta's Defense

Accused earlier this year of perpetrating a massive fraud on the paleontological community, Indian geologist Vishwa Jit Gupta has responded with the Lincoln defense: "You can't fool all of the people all of the time."

Last April, Australian paleontologist John Talent claimed simultaneously in *Science* and in other weekly science journals that Gupta had drawn scores of researchers unwittingly into a web of scientific deceit by invit-



Ruffed lemur. Unique to Madagascar.

Saving Madagascar Wildlife

Madagascar, one of the world's most biologically diverse areas, is the beneficiary of the first debt-for-nature swap to be funded by the U.S. government. The Agency for International Development has put up \$1 million to purchase part of the country's indebtedness. Under the arrangement, the worth of the contribution is doubled to about \$2.1 million,

which will be used to support local conservation groups and promote environment-related training and management.

Debt-for-nature swaps have become an increasingly popular mechanism for promoting conservation in poor countries. In another recent transaction, Costa Rica is financing conservation work by issuing nearly \$33 million worth of bonds through donations from Sweden and Holland. And the World Wildlife Fund has recently arranged debt-nature swaps with the Philippines and with Zambia.

Brazil is a prime candidate for debt-swap contributors but has failed to attract any takers because of the government's instability. Environmentalists hope the situation will improve after Brazilian elections this fall.

ing them to coauthor papers on fossils he said he'd discovered in the Himalayas. The fossils came from anywhere but the Himalayas, challenged Talent. Dastardly accusation, cried Gupta.

"Talent proclaims that I have been able to fool all of the people all of the time," says the feisty Gupta in the 7 September issue of the journal *Nature*. "The period concerned is a quarter of a century, and the number of people . . . more than 60. The contention is unbelievable."

But Gupta may have come pretty close to proving Lincoln wrong. Published in the same issue are mea culpa by four of Gupta's erstwhile coauthors. "I would like to start the process of putting the record straight," says one. "I suggested that a fact-finding committee should be set up to get to the truth," announces another. "I have never published on any fossils I have not collected myself [after my Gupta experience]," laments a third.

Amateur Hours on Hubble Telescope

The Hubble Space Telescope isn't merely one of the most promising, eagerly awaited, and expensive (\$1.4 billion) projects in the history of science; it's also one of the most sought after.

So why are five amateurs getting to use it? Space Telescope Science Institute director Riccardo Giacconi says that in gratitude for "decades of assistance" from amateurs, he has set aside 20 hours from the director's discretionary time, which is normally reserved for unexpected events such as comets or supernovas. Professionals have already been allocated some 2500 hours on the telescope scheduled for launch in March from Cape Canaveral.

The five projects were selected from several hundred proposals. Among the winners are a Seattle homemaker, who will hunt for massive protoplanets in a nearby star-forming region,

and a Rochester, New York, science teacher, who wants to look for evidence of frost formation on Jupiter's moon Io.

The Selling of Cold Fusion

At least two ventures have sprung up hoping to make money off the fusion-in-a-test-tube "discovery" of Stanley Pons and Martin Fleischmann at the University of Utah. Both groups are optimistic about its commercial potential.

"Cold fusion is for real, it is nuclear, and it is practical," says Bob Blosser of the new Fusion Information Center at the University of Utah Research Park. The center sells a monthly newsletter on cold fusion priced at \$345 for 12 issues. The center also offers educational software on cold fusion.

The other group, Princeton Fusion Reports, is selling a 140-page study of the commercial potential of cold fusion for \$647. Announces a press release: "Cold Fusion Could Reduce Electric Costs by 30% and Be Commercial in 10 to 20 Years."

Cocaine Trends

Hard to believe, but according to the government's latest National Household Survey on Drug Abuse, the number of current cocaine users has decreased by half since 1985—from 5.8 million to 2.9 million.

But cocaine abuse is becoming more concentrated. Blacks and Hispanics have increased their usage since 1985. And among the 8 million people who used some form of cocaine last year, the proportion of frequent users has climbed by 33%. This jump "exactly coincides with the appearance of crack," according to drug czar William Bennett. There has been a fivefold increase in medical emergencies due to cocaine abuse. Of the 46,000 reported in 1988, 15,000 related to crack.