

Briefings

edited by MARK H. CRAWFORD

Inspector General Cracks Down at NSF

The word "accountability" is taking on new meaning at the National Science Foundation. The agency's first permanent inspector general (IG), Linda G. Sundro, is making her presence felt with foundation bureaucrats and researchers.

In accordance with a congressional mandate, the new IG has issued her first *Semiannual Report to the Congress* on NSF's internal bookkeeping practices, allegations of financial wrongdoing, scientific misconduct, and disputes with academic institutions of expenses charged to NSF grants. This 25-page document reveals no great scandals at the agency, but may make good reading for researchers and university administrators who are anxious to avoid tangling with the IG. The report says that \$161,000 in agency funds were recovered and redirected as a result of audits covering the 6-month period ending 30 September 1989.

The report provides sketches of infractions such as the case of "an assistant scientist with a northwest research institute" who allegedly misrepresented his data in a grant proposal submitted to the agency. The IG report also lists all the institutions where NSF has found cause to challenge charges made to agency grants and in a few instances provides brief descriptions of infractions.

NSF General Counsel Charles Herz says this is the first time he can remember the agency issuing such a report. Until now, the results of NSF internal and external audits generally have been kept under wraps. The reports prepared by the IG's office, which was imposed on NSF in 1988, will be prepared every 6 months and will be public.

Africanized Bees Near Texas Border

The 28-month-old battle to slow the northward spread of the Africanized honey bee into the United States is coming to a close—and the bees are winning. Although Mexican and U.S. pest control agents are mounting a last-ditch effort near Veracruz on the Gulf Coast to delay the bees' migration, they are expected to cross the U.S. border into Texas by next winter and perhaps as soon as this summer, U.S. Department of Agriculture officials say.

A hybrid of the European honey bee and the African bee that was produced when African queens escaped after being imported into Brazil in 1956, the Africanized honey bees may be a threat to American agriculture and a public health nuisance.

Unless populations of the bee are controlled, USDA officials fear, they could displace U.S. bees, significantly reducing honey production and crop pollination here. In addition, the Africanized bees are more aggressive and more likely to sting humans when disturbed than their European counterparts.



Out of control? Africanized bees.

To combat these threats, Mexico's Ministry of Agriculture and USDA have been working together in a joint \$8.6-million program to dilute the undesirable genetic traits of the Africanized honey bees. To accomplish this, there are ongoing campaigns to promote matings with European drones and to destroy entire Africanized bee nests and swarms.

But once the bees cross the U.S. border, it is not clear what control efforts USDA will employ. Elba Quintero, USDA's program manager in Mexico City, told *Science* that the department has not established any policy or program as yet. Part of the reason for this, apparently, is that the department's jurisdiction may be limited by a law that restricts eradication programs against insects that are part of a natural migration, says one USDA official.

Active control programs will largely become a responsibility of individual states. It is expected, however, that USDA researchers will continue their work to find ways to eradicate the undesirable traits of the Africanized honey bee.

Herz and other NSF officials expect the next set of findings covering the first 6 months of fiscal year 1990 may be even more interesting. Says Herz of Sundro and her growing band of auditors, "they are just getting started."

Students: Watson Gets Mixed Grades

At a time when academic leaders are bemoaning the apathy and scientific illiteracy of the nation's students, Blairsville Senior High School in Pennsylvania must be doing something right. Students in the school's new advanced biology class have not only tackled Watson and Crick, but some of them have taken on James Watson himself for threatening to withhold data from Japanese scientists if that country does not cough up money for the genome project.

True, these dissenters are in the minority; the majority of the class sided with the Nobelist after reading an article about the controversy in *Science* (3 November 1989, p. 576) and wrote him a supportive letter.

"The Japanese have gone long enough benefiting from our ideas without paying their dues. . . . We would like to commend you for standing up for what you think is right and not just going along with everyone else and pretending nothing is wrong with the system."

But Jacky Thompson and Deborah Weaver disagree and told Watson so in their dissenting letter. "We feel that the data received from DNA research is too valuable to keep a secret. Money should not be an issue when lives could be saved from the information obtained. Both sides have to realize that this is an issue that affects the whole world, not just Japan and the

U.S.A."

The students have not yet received a response.

NSF Grant Sizes Trimmed for 1990

To cope with budget reductions imposed by Congress after the start of the 1990 fiscal year on 1 October, the National Science Foundation (NSF) has decided to cut investigators' research budgets by 2%. The across-the-board reductions will be applied to both new grants and old ones.

Even with these cuts, the agency still expects to increase the total number of awards it makes in 1990. NSF Comptroller Sandra Toye estimates that about 17,350 grants will be issued; about half of them will be new awards and the remainder are continuations of existing grants. Some 16,691 grants were issued in 1989.