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# Science

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The American Association for the Advancement of Science was founded in 1848 and incorporated in 1874. Its objectives are to further the work of scientists, to facilitate cooperation among them, to foster scientific freedom and responsibility, to improve the effectiveness of science in the promotion of human welfare, to advance education in science, and to increase public understanding and appreciation of the importance and promise of the methods of science in human progress.

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COVER Dark-field photomicrograph of the anterior hypothalamus of a hamster immunostained with antibodies to vasopressin, showing the paired suprachiasmatic nuclei (SCN) between the third ventricle and optic chiasm (top) and the magnocellular vasopressin cells (yellow fireworks) of the paraventricular nucleus, above which is the SCN. The SCN, the locus of the mammalian biological clock, can be identified as two oval structures at the base of the brain (toward title). See page 975. [Photographic image by Russell Foster]

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# Tricoordinate mercury complex

**HE** mercury resistance proteins (MerR) of bacteria have a high affinity binding site for mercury. When they sense excess mercury inside the cell, they activate a number of genes that produce proteins that act to "cleanse" the environment, converting the extremely toxic Hg(II) ion to the less toxic and volatile Hg(0) metal form. Helmann et al. found that three highly conserved cysteine residuesthose in positions 79, 114, and 123 of the MerR protein of Bacillus-are necessary and sufficient for the formation of a protein-Hg(II) ion complex (page 946). The MerR protein is a dimer of two identical polypeptides and has a total of eight cysteine residues; binding studies with a series of proteins in which cysteine residues were changed to alanines showed that an active complex requires that two of the residues---114 and 123—are present on the same subunit while residue 79 can be contributed by the second. Only one Hg(II) ion can bind per dimer, perhaps because the subunits overlap in such a way as to preclude simultaneous binding in each. Although metal complexes that are coordinated by two, four, five, and six sulfur atoms are relatively common, those that are coordinated by three sulfurs are fairly rare.

## Predator's cues and snail's pace

The presence of predatory crayfish in the water dramatically alters life-history characteristics of the freshwater snail *Physella virgata virgata* (page 949). In a predator-free environment, snails reproduce when their shells are about 4 millimeters long; the lifespans of such snails are 3 to 5 months. If, however, the stream is also inhabited by *Orconectes virilis* crayfish, the snails grow bigger (to double the normal size), live longer (11 to 14 months), and reproduce later. Crowl and Covich find that only when actively preying crayfish are nearby do these changes take place; they attribute the changes to signals from a water-borne chemical, most likely a snail protein that has been degraded by a crayfish enzyme. Allocation of the snail's resources away from reproduction and toward growth and community survival shows that, like plants, these snails can be phenotypically plastic in response to environmental cues.

# Double fertilization in seed plants

OUBLE fertilization, which was considered to be a unique and defining characteristic of flowering plants (the angiosperms), is in fact also found in a nonflowering seed plant. Friedman reports on its occurrence during sexual reproduction in a low-lying green-stemmed desert shrub of the widely distributed genus Ephedra (page 951). The first fertilization in both angiosperms and Ephedra involves union of sperm and egg nuclei; this fusion leads to the production of an embryo. In angiosperms, the second fertilization involves a second sperm nucleus and two polar nuclei of the embryo sac (one of which is a sister nucleus to the egg nucleus), and this yields endosperm (nutritive tissue). In Ephedra, the sperm's second nucleus fuses with the sister nucleus of the egg nucleus and, although the fate of this nucleus is unclear, it is known that an endosperm does not form. Phylogenetic studies of seed plants have indicated that the order Gnetales, of which Ephedra is a member, is more closely related to angiosperms than are other extant orders of seed plants; double fertilization may have been a property of the common ancestor of the Gnetales and the angiosperms.

# Channel switching in cell membranes

They alter the electrical and contractile

properties of the heart and also affect the functioning of the kidney and the blood volume. ANPs suppress cardiac electrical activity at both sodium and calcium channels. Sorbera and Morad report that sodium ion channels, which are essential for the excitability of not only heart cells but also nerve and muscle cells, show increased permeability to calcium ions when they are exposed to ANPs (page 969). Normally these channels have but little permeability to calcium. It is likely that a conformation change in the channel, induced by the binding of ANPs or by an intermediary protein to an extracellular site, causes repression of the sodium current, enhances calcium permeability, and enhances calcium current conductance. Damping of heart tissue excitability and contractability thus has an impact on many types of cells, including those that secrete the ANPs.

### Pace setting brain tissue

ACEMAKER cells that establish circadian rhythms in hamsters reside in the suprachiasmatic nucleus (SCN) of the hypothalamus of the brain (page 975). This has been demonstrated directly by Ralph et al. through a series of transplantation experiments; in these studies, SCN tissue was exchanged between three types of hamsters-normal hamsters whose circadian rhythms have 24-hour periodicity, clock mutants whose activity periods cycle every 20 hours, and heterozygous animals with a 22-hour period. The SCN of the host hamster was first functionally destroyed and the animal rendered arrhythmic; some weeks later and within a matter of days after a small block of donor SCN was transplanted, motor rhythmicity resumed. Only a remarkably small (1 microliter) volume of tissue was needed for the establishment of a new rhythmic pattern, and this pattern reflected the period characteristic of the donor. The lack of any host-tissue contribution to the rhythm suggests that, at least in the hamster, the SCN may serve as the key pacemaker.

### Ruth Levy Guyer

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### Women, Work, and Child Welfare in the Third World

Editors: **Joanne Leslie**, international nutrition consultant, and **Michael Paolisso**, anthropologist with the International Center for Research on Women.

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### 15th Annual AAAS Colloquium on Science & Technology Policy

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The AAAS Science & Technology Policy Colloquium provides a forum in which federal and industrial policy-makers and members of the scientific and engineering community can participate in an open discussion of S&T policy-related issues.

The Colloquium occurs after the release of the President's budget but before final congressional action, thus allowing

for the timely exchange of information about the budget and the consequences of various policy issues involving science and technology.

**Who Should Attend:** Scientists, administrators, industrial R&D managers, policymakers, academicians, association officials, federal grant recipients, students, and others with an interest in science and technology policy.

### - PROGRAM –

### Thursday, 12 April

**Welcome:** Richard C. Atkinson, *Chancellor*, UC-San Diego and *Chairman*, *Board of Directors*, AAAS

**Keynote:** D. Allan Bromley, *Director*, *OSTP*, and *Assistant to the President for Science and Technology* 

Science and Technology in 1990: Where Have We Been and Where Are We Going? (Panel)

- Overview of FY 1991 R&D Budget Proposals (AAAS staff)
- ♦ R&D in the Federal Budget: 1976-1990 William D. Carey, Carnegie Corp. of New York
- Perspectives on R&D in the 1990s Ralph Gomory\*, Sloan Foundation
- $\blacklozenge$  Science, Technology, and the Future

### **Reforming the Budget Process** (Luncheon address) Harry S. Havens, *GAO*

### **The Changing World Order: Implications for Science & Technology** (Symposium)

- ♦ Europe 1992
- ◆ Soviet/East European Transformation and S&T
- ✦ Redefining National Security

♦ DOE

✦ Changing Nature of Military Threat

## *Major R&D Agency Budgets for FY 1991* (Concurrent small group sessions)

NASA

◆ DOD

⁺ ♦ NIH

♦ NSF

### Friday, 13 April

**Breakfast Address:** Bob Traxler<sup>\*</sup> (D-MI), Member, U.S. House of Representatives

### Concurrent Symposia

- ✦ Cashing In on Academic R&D
- ◆ Science & Math Education: New Options
- ◆ U.S. Space Policy in the 1990s and Beyond

**Policies to Improve U.S. Industrial Competitiveness** (Luncheon address)

**Closing Remarks:** Richard S. Nicholson, *Executive Officer*, *AAAS* 

\* Invited

Budget discussions will be based on AAAS Report XV: Research and Development, FY 1991, a comprehensive analysis of the proposals for the FY 1991 budget, prepared by AAAS and a group of its affiliated scientific, engineering, and higher education associations. Registrants receive a copy of this report at (or before) the Colloquium, Proceedings following the Colloquium, and Congressional Action on R&D in the FY 1991 Budget in the fall.

For further information, contact: Directorate for Science and Policy Programs, 1333 H Street, NW, Washington, DC 20005; (202) 326-6600.

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Cardholder's signature						
Mail bottom half (hotel rese	rvation form) to: Rea	servations, The Cap	ital Hilton, 16th & F	K Streets, NW, Washington, DC 20036		