RANDOM SAMPLES

edited by CHRISTOPHER ANDERSON

Sick Rat Scare at Kyoto University

Biomedical research at Japan's Kyoto University has fallen victim to a rat-borne disease. Work by some 40 research groups is on hold after an outbreak of hemorrhagic fever with renal syndrome (HFRS) spread among the institute's rat population early this year and infected one researcher. To protect the rest of the rat population and their human tenders, officials closed off parts of the university's Institute of Laboratory Animals last month. "There was no choice," says Junzo Yamada, head of the institute. "We couldn't risk exposing researchers to this." The hantavirus that causes HFRS can infect humans who inhale contaminated feces, and the resulting disease can in some cases be fatal.

Health authorities in Japan have been wary of the disease ever since a number of researchers came down with it in the 1970s. Since then, biomedical labs around the country have been tested occasionally for the virus. After being surprised by positive test results last year, the Kyoto institute sampled all of the lab rat colonies and destroyed those with evidence of the virus—2000 rats in all.

Yamada says the affected facilities will remain sealed, and the research on hold, until uninfected rats kept there remain virus free.

Press Wins Battle With PCAST Over Access

It's not clear whether the President's Council of Advisers on Science and Technology (PCAST) will continue to exist under President Bill Clinton, but one thing's for sure: If its members ever meet again, they'll think twice before closing the doors. Last month, in a settlement of a lawsuit filed by a half-dozen media groups, the 13-member White House advisory panel of scientists, university administrators, and corporate officers admitted that it has illegally closed some of its meetings to the public over the past 2 years.

As part of the settlement last month, the Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP), whose former director, Allan Bromley, headed PCAST, released all documents prepared by the group since its creation in 1990. PCAST also agreed to pay the media groups $6,000 to cover legal fees.

The lawsuit was initiated by the Bureau of National Affairs, which publishes several science-related newsletters, and was later joined by several other press groups, including *Science*. Beyond charging that PCAST illegally closed its meetings, the suit complained that PCAST failed to give sufficient notice of upcoming meetings and withheld documents from Freedom of Information Act searches.

PCAST defended its policies by saying that some of the subjects under discussion included classified information, issues of personal privacy, or preliminary agency actions—matters that would potentially qualify for an exemption to the open-door rule of the Federal Advisory Committee Act.

But that claim fell apart after OSTP was forced to turn over the minutes of the PCAST meetings, says Eleanor Smith, the attorney for the media groups. The documents chronicle benign discussions of such subjects as a biodiversity report and a project on the health of U.S. universities. "As far as we could discern, they invoked the exemptions without regard to the matters being discussed," Smith says.

The effect of the settlement won't be clear, says OSTP counsel Holly Gwin, until OSTP decides whether to give PCAST a new lease on life. But the latest word suggests that Clinton may scrap PCAST for a new set of advisory councils—which might not be subject to the open-door requirement at all.

PETER ARNOLD INC./H. BARNETT

Easy listening? Lower decibels should avoid a whale of a problem.

Another Round for Noisy Ocean Temperature Test

It's a deal a talk show host would kill for: $35 million to sound off for a while. But there's one other aspect of the bargain that might be a bit tough for the average radio personality: You've got to listen to your own noise and gauge whether the world is warming. Luckily, that's nothing new for oceanographer Walter Munk, who last week won funding from the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency to conduct a second trial of his underwater sonic thermometer of the world's oceans.

Munk, of San Diego's Scripps Institution of Oceanography, pulses sound waves from underwater loudspeakers to receivers located thousands of miles away. By clocking the amount of time that sonic journey takes, Munk and his collaborators can precisely measure temperatures in entire ocean basins (sound travels at different rates in water of different temperatures) and watch for signs of global warming.

His new experiment, the Acoustic Thermometry of Ocean Climate (ATOC) project, will take the temperature of the entire Pacific Ocean and involve researchers from 11 institutions in seven nations. If that seems ambitious, consider Munk's last experiment: It shot sonic blasts from an island near Antarctica through five oceans. That test created such loud underwater noise that the project almost sank because of concerns that it could damage the hearing of marine mammals or scare them away from feeding spots (*Science*, 17 May 1991, p. 912).

In the new experiment, Munk's team will drop loudspeakers off Hawaii and the central California coast early next year and pick up the sound waves as far away as New Zealand. This experiment, while more limited in scope, is expected to yield more accurate data than the previous shot heard 'round the world. A welcome side effect of the shorter range is that the sound levels will be several orders of magnitude lower.

"We think concerns about acoustic impact [on marine mammals] are much reduced," says co-investigator Peter Worcester of Scripps. If all goes well, Worcester says, ATOC will run 10 to 20 years to get a better picture of global climate changes and will expand to more ocean basins around the world.

Extra! Latest Misconduct News!

How times have changed in scientific misconduct. The Public Health Service's Office of Research Integrity (ORI), which inherited the job of investigating misconduct allegations from the troubled—and often secretive—Office of Scientific Integrity at the National Institutes of Health, is now publishing a newsletter. Imaginatively titled *ORI Newsletter*, the free quarterly fills six pages with ORI's internal workings and plans. If that were not enough to put investigative reporters out of work, the newsletter includes case studies of closed investigations. This month's episode: a case of plagiarism that resulted in a loss of tenure. Leaving a shred of hope for the reporters, the newsletter doesn't name names.