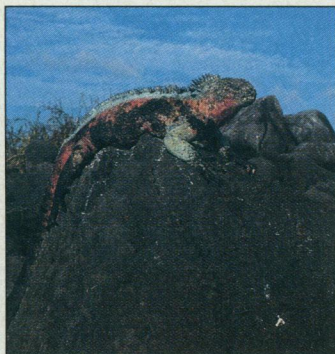


edited by JOCELYN KAISER



MANUELLO PAGANELLI

Fragile fellow. Scientists say new law would have threatened iguanas and other Galápagos species.

Trouble in the Galápagos Islands

Science is under siege in the Galápagos. Protesters armed with machetes have taken over the road to the Darwin Research Station and the Galápagos National Park headquarters. The crisis echoes a recent occupation by fishers angered by a fishing ban (*Science*, 3 February, p. 611). Trouble erupted anew after Ecuadorian President Sixto Duran Ballen vetoed a bill on 1 September crafted by Galápagos congressman Eduardo Veliz.

The proposed law was meant to respond to needs to limit immigration, regulate fishing, and establish a quarantine to curb the introduction of foreign species. But it failed to address these issues, says Craig MacFarland, president of the Darwin Foundation, and would have "put control of the park in the hands of local politicians."

The veto also killed a proposed pay hike for Galápagos public workers, and this may be one reason why some people heeded Veliz's call to protest, MacFarland says. A local mayor has also threatened to take tourists hostage and burn park areas. Those things haven't happened, but neither have troops dislodged the protesters. Only a fraction of the station's 45 staffers are working. "We are glad to be intact, but growing frustrated because the science and conservation efforts grow ever farther behind," wrote U.S. biologist Heidi Snell in an e-mail from the station this week.

Duran plans to appoint a tripartite commission to draft another Galápagos law, which MacFarland thinks could reach Congress for a vote in a few months.

Panel Gives Cold Shoulder to South Pole ...

Could tight budgets and the end of the Cold War trigger the end of a 38-year U.S. presence at the South Pole? The Senate panel that appropriates National Science Foundation (NSF) funding is calling for close scrutiny of the Antarctic program, an uneasy alliance of scientific research built upon the desire for a U.S. presence on the frozen continent to deter Soviet expansion. The panel, chaired by Senator Kit Bond (R-MO), is expected to argue this week that it is time to re-examine U.S. Antarctic policy. The panel wants the interagency National Science and Technol-

ogy Council to take on the task.

The administration is already worried about the \$200 million NSF spends yearly on the program. White House Science Adviser Jack Gibbons and NSF Director Neal Lane have been talking quietly in recent months, with the planned \$250 million South Pole station high on their agenda.

In the meantime, the Senate panel has spared NSF from major budget cuts for 1996, adding \$40 million for research to the House version of the funding bill. That's \$160 million below the White House request, but NSF officials aren't complaining.

... But Finds Space for Most NASA Programs

In this era of dwindling budgets, managers at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) were positively relieved earlier this week when a Senate panel only cut the agency's budget by \$121 million. The subcommittee chaired by Senator Kit Bond (R-MO) took a slice from human space flight, space science, and mission support efforts to reach a \$13.8 billion budget for NASA in 1996—\$127 million above what the House approved.

Among the wounded were life and microgravity sciences, which would lose \$37 million from a \$483 million budget. Also nicked was the \$1.3 billion Mission to Planet Earth—home of the Earth Observing System—which was shrunk by \$60 million.

But NASA isn't out of the woods yet. The House wants to take some \$1.3 billion more from the overall \$62 billion bill, and the House and Senate must iron out the difference before sending it on to the president.

Nobelists Champion NIST Labs

Led by a bevy of Nobel laureates, the U.S. scientific community this week rallied to support the beleaguered laboratories of the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST). Harvard University's Norman Ramsey and colleagues presented a pair of letters to Congress backing the labs—one signed by Ramsey and 24 other Nobelists in physics, the other by the presidents of 18 scientific societies representing over 1 million experts in science, engineering, and medicine.

The show of support came less than a week after the Senate Governmental Affairs Committee approved a bill by Chair William Roth (R-DE) to transfer NIST's standards-making functions to a new independent agency. But the bill doesn't spell out the fate of NIST's basic research facilities, raising fears that the labs could be abolished. Other proposed bills would sell off the labs to industry.

Either option "could be a major disaster," Nobelist J. Robert Schrieffer of Florida State University said at a Washington, D.C., news conference held to release the letters. Schrieffer said he doubts industry would continue NIST's research. But industries from electrical power to semiconductor manufacturing have saved billions of dollars each year from the 94-year-old agency's standards research, the laureates note. "It is unthinkable that a modern nation could expect to remain competitive without these services," their letter says. Congress is expected to decide the fate of NIST's labs in the next few weeks.

Is Lander California Dreaming?

Eric Lander of MIT's Whitehead Institute acknowledges that he's been working as chief external adviser to Hoffmann-La Roche, the Swiss pharmaceutical giant, about its plans to launch a genomics center near Stanford University. But when asked about the widespread rumor that he's in line to head the new Palo Alto center, he parries with a deft non-denial: "There is, as yet, no basis in fact" for the rumor, he says. But he agrees that it's "not inconceivable Roche could turn around and ask me if I would" become the director.

Roche's spokesperson at its Nutley, New Jersey, offices says she thinks "we are in the last stages of negotiating with someone" to be chief. The search began last fall when Roche announced that the company would open a new research center in Palo Alto (*Science*, 4 November 1994, p. 723).

At Stanford, the official handling the Roche talks couldn't be reached for comment. But a Stanford biologist warned that some faculty members are leery of the deal, fearing that academic privileges might be curtailed by industry sponsors.

New British Research Institute

Work will soon begin to convert an empty London hospital building into a major biomedical research center, thanks to a corporate donor that's kicking in some seed money—as well as one of the institute's new chiefs.

Salvador Moncada, now group principal scientist at Glaxo Wellcome's laboratories in Beckenham, Kent, U.K., will become scientific director of the new Institute of Basic Biomedical Research at University College London (UCL). His move was confirmed in a deal signed last week between Glaxo Wellcome and UCL. The drug company will contribute £9 million to £10 million (\$14 million to \$15 million) for capital costs and to back a collaborative program led by Moncada. The cash pledge will help UCL purchase the neighboring University College Hospital building to house the 400-staffer institute.