Our previous analysis, based on a multiple linear regression model, has demonstrated that in the range of paternal ages of 35 to 55 years, the mean loss in daughters' life span is 0.16 ± 0.06 years per each additional year of paternal age (sample size, $n = 2159$; Student's test, $t = 2.43$; $P = 0.02$). It turned out, however, that for the subgroup of younger fathers (35 to 45 years) the mean loss of daughters' life span is small (0.02 ± 0.12 years per each additional year of paternal age) and statistically insignificant ($n = 1651$; $t = 0.16$; $P = 0.87$), while for older fathers (45 to 55 years) this loss is particularly high (0.48 ± 0.21 years per each additional year of paternal age) and significant ($n = 598$; $t = 2.34$; $P = 0.02$).

These results are consistent with the general conclusion of James Crow on the nonlinear accelerating increase of mutation rates with paternal age (*1*) and could decrease the anxiety among the majority of fathers who reproduce before 45 years.

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Costa Rican All-Taxa Survey

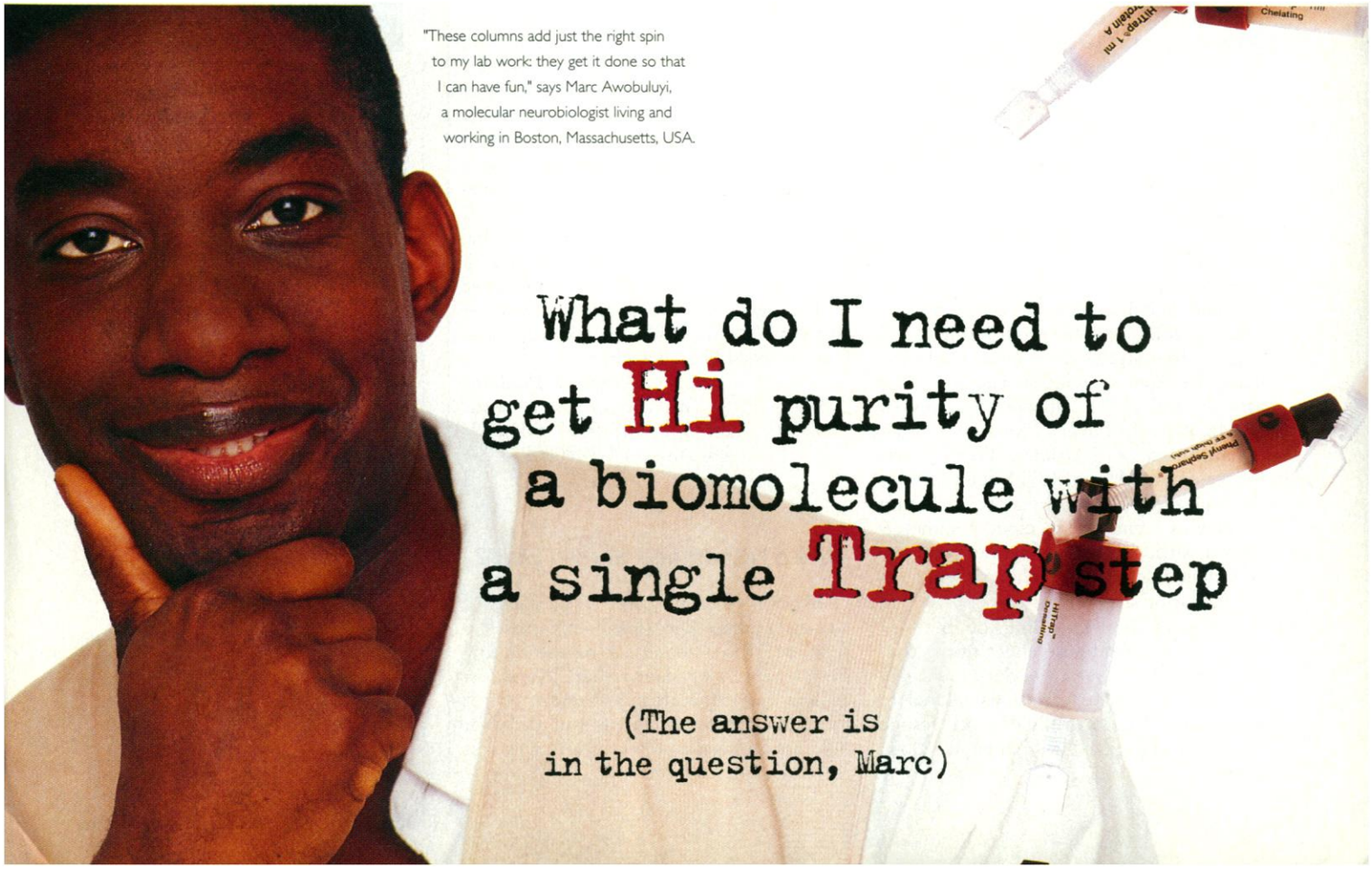
We wish to clarify some concepts in the recent article "Unique, all-taxa survey in Costa Rica 'self-destructs' " (News, 9 May, p. 893) by Jocelyn Kaiser.

The funding opportunity generated by the All-Taxa Biological Inventory (ATBI) was indeed restructured into a new set of national inventory actions within a broader initiative that we term Sustainable Biodiversity Development. This was agreed upon by Costa Rica's National System of Conservation Areas (SINAC) (which includes the Guanacaste Conservation Area) and the Costa Rican National Institute for Biodiversity (INBio) on the following basis.

SINAC, INBio, and the taxonomic community dedicated significant time and resources to the ATBI during its planning phase, yet the initiative was not able to find the sizable economic support required to start the project as originally conceived. The ATBI was envisioned by all of us as a total inventory in a specific area containing different major ecosystems. However, economic, scientific, and social considerations have led INBio and SINAC to the decision to focus the inventory part of the Sustainable Biodiversity Development initiative on key taxonomic groups (at least vertebrates, plants, molluscs, nematodes, Lepidoptera, Hymenoptera, Coleoptera, fungi, and Diptera) and in five conservation areas (Amistad Caribe, Amistad Pacifico, Guanacaste, Arenal, and Osa).

The search for economic resources for this project with the support of the government of Costa Rica is ongoing. Except for the funds available for the planning stage, none of the funds mentioned in the article have been disbursed. As in every project carried out in INBio, any funds received will be subjected to internationally accepted auditing procedures. INBio is negotiating with agencies and governments the details of the new initiative that will contribute to the sustainability of the entire National System of Conservation Areas and INBio.

The fact that SINAC and INBio decided to reformulate the ATBI initiative does not mean that INBio's enthusiasm for a national biodiversity inventory has been altered in any way. INBio's inventory process continues today with as much vitality and



force as always. INBio's mission is to promote greater awareness of the value of biodiversity and thereby achieve conservation and improve the quality of life for society. Sustainable biodiversity development of five conservation areas guides the institution toward this mission and strengthens biodiversity conservation in Costa Rica. We hope that the international scientific community will continue to enthusiastically support this mutually beneficial initiative.

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Whitehall Arcana

The little ScienceScope piece, ironically shaded Tory blue, entitled "Labour names a science minister" (9 May, p. 887) says that Margaret Beckett, the President of the Board of Trade, "raised hopes that science might be given high priority when she announced that she would have 'special responsibility' for science and technology." The previous paragraph refers to "a decision 2 years ago that placed the science minister at a junior level within the Department of Trade and Industry." The reality is significantly different, and a bit more complicated.

The U.K. Office of Science and Technology (OST) was originally created in the Cabinet Office in 1992, but it never was stand alone. It was grafted onto the Office of Public Services, whose Cabinet Minister rejoices in the rather Alice in Wonderlandish title "Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster." William Waldegrave, who is often referred to as "the first Science Minister," was indeed the Cabinet Minister who spoke for science, across all departments, in Cabinet; he did this as the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, and his responsibilities embraced both this science role and the oversight of all aspects of public service. He never was simply a Minister for science. And he always had a junior Minister (not a Cabinet Minister), who assisted him with his science responsibilities. Both William Waldegrave and his successor as Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, David Hunt, took considerable interest in science, and successive junior Ministers had correspondingly low profiles.

In the summer of 1995, the OST was moved into the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI). Thereupon the President of the Board of Trade, Ian Lang, assumed a role in Cabinet similar to that previously held by Waldegrave and Hunt. Lang added to his role as Head of DTI the additional responsibility of speaking in Cabinet for all matters having to do with research and development, across all departments. That is, he was similar to the previous Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster in wearing two hats, although different in that DTI was a bigger job than was the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, so that the broad transdepartmental science role was correspondingly a smaller part of his job.

With the transfer of OST into DTI, there was, as there had been before, a junior Minister responsible for science and technology. Ian Taylor, however, had much greater visibility and played a role that really did engage the science community. But the structure remained unchanged in principle from