

RANDOM SAMPLES

edited by CONSTANCE HOLDEN

The Ice Man Movie Cometh

First came the Ice Man. Then the Ice Man museum. Now, the Ice Man movie. Can the action figure be far behind?

Ever since the mummified 5300-year-old remains of a late Stone Age man were found near a glacier in the Alps in 1991, scientists have clamored for a chance to study the prehistoric envoy and his effects. The public, meanwhile, has flocked to see the mummy, which the Austrians nicknamed Ötzi, after the Ötztaler Alps.

Chauvinism has helped fuel the boom, as Ötzi, found 93 meters south of the Austrian-Italian border, has been claimed by both countries as one of their own. The Italians,



Candidate for next year's Oscars?

who call him "Similaun Man" after the mountain on which he died, have the body, which has turned into a premier tourist attraction: The South Tyrolean Museum of Archaeology in Bolzano has chalked up 400,000 visitors since its \$10 million Ice Man exhibit opened in March 1998. In February, when the exhibit was closed for renovations, the number of visitors plummeted from

800 to 100 a day.

Last month, the Austrians put out a strong bid to capture some of the Ice Man's aura by releasing a feature film, *The Ötztal Man and His World*, that depicts Ötzi as a mountain man called Akum who lives in a

thatched hut and hunts with bow and arrow. "It's not really scientific, but the movie has a nice story," says Klaus Öggl, an archaeobotanist at the University of Innsbruck. The real Ice Man's bow was not even finished, he says, and he was probably more shepherd than hunter.

Meanwhile, Italy's Ice Man enthusiasts are trying to convince the post office to approve

Scientists Clueless vs. Creationism?

"My experience with academics is that they have a short attention span and are also pretty clueless as to what needs to be done to make a political change. They tend to think that if they write a letter to the editor, they have 'done their duty.'"

—Eugenie Scott of the National Center for Science Education in El Cerrito, California, on efforts to defend the teaching of evolution.

a new stamp featuring the man who, they say, judging from the pollen found in his colon, clearly hailed from the Italian side of the Alps.

Some ovenbird species make nests lined with grass or snake skin, others adorn their homes with elaborate domes or awnings. From the array of domestic styles, researchers have deduced the likely order of branchings of this common bird's family tree.

Ovenbirds are a family of small bug-eaters that live in the Neotropics, from the sand dunes of Chile to the mountain forests of Mexico. Throughout their range, the 240 recognized species construct enclosed nests, where eggs incubate in the dark, safe from weather and predators. Beyond that the birds diverge: Different species have perfected the art of enclosure with myriad forms and resources.

Ornithologists Krzysztof Zyskowski and Richard Prum of the University of Kansas, Lawrence, thought that this "startling diversity of nest types" might help them sort out the hitherto murky ovenbird family tree. They analyzed 24 nest characteristics, including shape, material, and building behaviors—such as tree-hollowing, leaf-stripping, or plant-macerating—looking for common materials or methods shared by different species that would



point to a recent common ancestor.

Their analysis paid off, they report in the October issue of *The Auk*, in the first published ovenbird family tree. For example, the best known ovenbird, *Furnarius*, builds ovenlike mud domes atop fence posts and trees throughout South America. That bird was believed to be related only remotely to other genera that nest in earthen burrows. But Zyskowski and Prum found that the linings of both species' nests are cup-shaped and made of grass and strips of inner bark. They concluded that *Furnarius* evolved from a lineage of earthen cavity nesters.

"Previously, most people would have said that nests are too plastic to provide evidence of evolutionary relationships," says Robert Zink, an ornithologist at the Bell Museum in St. Paul, Minnesota. Zyskowski and Prum, he says, "have paved the way for using this sort of evidence in phylogenetic studies of other groups."



Telling an Ovenbird By Its Nest

Physics Pantheon

It's official: Albert Einstein is the greatest physicist of all time. So *Physics World* has proclaimed after a millennial poll the magazine conducted among 100 of the world's top physicists. Each was invited to submit a list of five. The winners from 61 nominees:

Physicist	Dates	Country	Number of votes
Albert Einstein	1879–1955	Germany/Switzerland/U.S.	119
Isaac Newton	1642–1727	Great Britain	96
James Clerk Maxwell	1831–1879	Great Britain	67
Niels Bohr	1885–1962	Denmark	47
Werner Heisenberg	1901–1976	Germany	30
Galileo Galilei	1564–1642	Italy	27
Richard Feynman	1918–1988	U.S.	23
Paul Dirac	1902–1984	France/Great Britain	22
Erwin Schrödinger	1887–1961	Austria	22
Ernest Rutherford	1871–1937	New Zealand/Great Britain	20