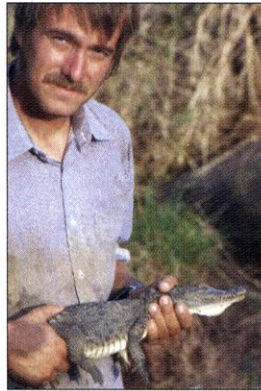


Remnant Crocs Found in Sahara

Remember the urban legend about crocodiles thriving in New York City's sewers? A team of German zoologists has stumbled upon a population of Nile crocodiles in another improbable setting: the middle of the Sahara desert.

Wolfgang Böhme of the Zoologisches Forschungsinstitut und Museum Alexander Koenig in Bonn and his team found

the crocs during a reptile study expedition in the Western Sahara. Hearing of an enigmatic crocodile colony in southern Mauritania, the team sped to the site, a large rocky plateau ruptured by crevices and cavities. There, some 5 meters down, they saw puddles and spied an underground pond about 20 meters wide. They also discovered four African Nile crocodiles (*Crocodylus niloticus*). Adults were about 2 meters long, says



Grad student Hemmo Nickel with juvenile croc.

Böhme, compared with 6 meters for Nile dwellers.

Böhme, who announced the find at a press conference in Bonn last month, calls the Mauritanian crocodiles "a tropical relic" that has managed to survive for thousands of years in isolation

from other crocodile populations. Only 10,000 years ago, most of the Sahara was fertile savannah. When the desert expanded, it cut off some groups in refuges like the underground

water system, or guelta, that Böhme's team found.

"Finding a new, isolated population of large animals is sensational," says zoologist Steven Perry of the University of Bonn. "These animals are a [rare] model of a new species in the process of being formed." Nile crocs have been found in one other unexpected location, a mountain range in Chad.

Much remains to be learned about the lifestyle of the beasts. "Given that Nile crocodiles are highly territorial," Perry wonders, "how do they manage to [get along with each other] in such a confined area?" Böhme hopes to fit some with radio transmitters to find out.

Idea Factory

Scientific innovators will be relieved to know that "Ideas" are up 23% in the proposed 2001 budget for the National Science Foundation (NSF). And "People" and "Tools" have jumped by 11%. Is NSF dumbing down its mission? Or is simple better?

NSF unveiled these concepts last week—replacements for such categories as research, training, and facilities—in hopes of clarifying the agency's mission for laypeople, including the legislators who will pass judgment on its \$4.6 billion request.

"People's eyes tend to glaze over when you talk about 'discovery at the frontiers of knowledge,'" explains NSF budget officer Marty Rubinstein. "This is an attempt to communicate in ways that are easier to understand." The new terms also fit the spirit of a 1993 law telling agencies to spell out what the public is getting for its tax dollars (*Science*, 6 January 1995, p. 20).

Some wonder if NSF has gone a little overboard. "Congress will still want to know what happened to the money it appropriated," says one science policy analyst. "And why drop 'research?' Everybody understands that word."

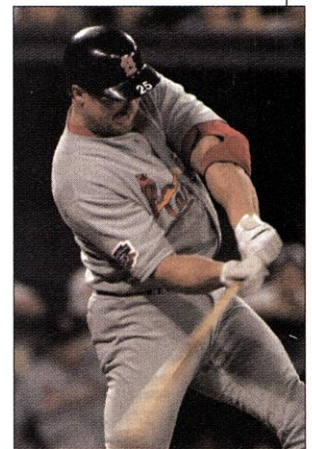
Andro Strikes Out

Did hormones help Mark McGwire shatter baseball's home run record in 1998? Along with the hoopla over his 70-homer season, a controversy sprouted over the fact that McGwire was regularly—and legally—taking androstenedione, a steroid that many athletes use for its alleged muscle-building properties.

Major league baseball responded by commissioning a study of andro. The upshot: The body converts it into extra testosterone, a no-no throughout the sports world.

Andro is regarded as "natural"—it shows up in some tree bark—which means it can be sold as a dietary supplement, says endocrinologist Don Catlin of the University of California, Los Angeles. But many sports have banned andro, noting that it, like testosterone, may cause liver damage and prostate cancer.

The study, by endocrinologists Joel Finkelstein and Benjamin Leder of Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston, compared hormone levels in three small groups of men getting either a placebo, 100 milligrams, or 300 mg of andro a day for 1 week. Both andro groups showed significant increases in estradiol—a potent female hormone that causes breast development in men. The 300-mg group also had a 30% rise in testosterone levels, the researchers report in the 9 February *Journal of the American Medical Association*. Doctors are still divided over whether andro builds muscle. Says Douglas King, an endocrinologist at Iowa State University in Ames, "Certainly the side effects outweigh any possible benefit."



Muscular Mark McGwire.

Science and math education for women and minorities got a big boost this month as the Heinz Family Foundation announced five winners of its annual \$250,000 prizes.

For bettering "the human condition," Heinz honored Robert Moses, who in 1982 started the Algebra Project, a grassroots effort to prepare

Heinz Dishes Out \$1.25 Million

students for college-level math. Chemist Mary Good, former Commerce Undersecretary and now dean of a new College of Information Science and Systems Engineering at the University of Arkansas, was honored for her efforts to

get more women and minorities into science. And psychologist Edward Zigler of Yale, the "father of Head Start," won plaudits for his public-policy work. The other winners are Paul Gorman, founder of the National Religious Partnership for the Environment, and author and environmentalist Peter Matthiessen.