Giving Kid's Drugs A Closer Look

A majority of the drugs used to treat seriously ill children have never been tested on children, meaning that doctors are often in the dark about potential side effects and proper dosages. To address such problems, the Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation last week announced that it will donate $8 million over the next 2 years to establish the Glaser Pediatric Research Network to expedite drug studies.

Until this year, when the Food and Drug Administration Modernization Act took effect, manufacturers weren't required to test drugs on children, notes Philip Pizzo, chief of pediatrics at the Harvard-affiliated Boston Children's Hospital. The new network, he says, will create "a sustained infrastructure" that will make it much easier to do coordinated clinical studies for everything from cancer to psychiatric illnesses. Research priorities for the network—which includes children's hospitals affiliated with Harvard; Stanford; the University of California, Los Angeles; Baylor College of Medicine in Houston; and the University of California, San Francisco—will be set by a scientific advisory panel that is yet to be named.

Pamela Anderson accepts PETA award.

Animal Research: Celebrities Wanted

Medical research advocates are bemoaning their lack of star power when it comes to battling the animal rights movement. While the high-visibility People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) is getting help from glitterati such as ex-Beatle Paul McCartney, officials at the opposing Foundation for Biomedical Research (FBR) say they're having no luck getting stars to align their way. "I've got a bunch of Nobel laureates on my board," says FBR director Frankie Trull. "But can they get a celebrity? No."

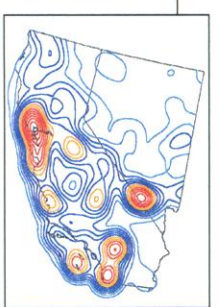
The animal rights movement is richer than ever, judging by PETA's end-of-the-year fundraising figures. Thanks in part to a Hollywood bash hosted by McCartney and attended by such names as Alec Baldwin, Pamela Anderson, and Richard Pryor, PETA pulled in $16.5 million in 1999, a healthy leap over the previous year's $14 million. "We're bigger every year," affirms PETA president Ingrid Newkirk. And increasingly global: 3 months ago the group, which has four European offices in addition to its headquarters in Norfolk, Virginia, opened an office in Bombay. Why India? "Vegetarianism is fading," explains Newkirk, and "the leather industry is huge."

Meanwhile, the Washington, D.C.–based FBR, with a budget of less than $800,000, is grinding its teeth with envy. There has been a troubling increase in antiresearch activities—such as the ransacking of neurology labs at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities (*Science*, 16 April 1999, p. 410). And Trull is particularly concerned about PETA's inroads into schools. "There's a whole new generation" of animal rightsers blossoming now, she says, "and the celebrities are helping."

The FBR has a sexy new Web site (www.fbresearch.org), but what Trull really wants is some show biz support. Even celebrities with health problems, though, won't play ball. "Take Mary Tyler Moore—a diabetic—she remains a big animal rights advocate," says Trull. Those who do sympathize won't go public, she says, "because it brings them negative publicity."

One Nation, Many Species

Two conservation groups have produced the most comprehensive look yet at the United States' creatures, plants, and biomes in a richly illustrated, 400-page tome called *Precious Heritage: The Status of Biodiversity in the United States.** Included is a first-ever topography (see map) showing "hotspots" of species richness and rarity, which portrays the biological uniqueness of areas based on the distribution of 2800 at-risk species. Where can biological treasure be found? The Appalachians, Hawaii, and California rank high, with "secondary hotspots" in areas such as Big Bend in Texas. Other fun facts: The U.S. has more than 200,000 native species—double previous tallies—and the world's richest collections of freshwater mussels and salamanders.



* By The Nature Conservancy and the Association for Biodiversity Information; available for $45 from Oxford University Press.

CREDITS: (TOP) *PRECIOUS HERITAGE: THE STATUS OF BIODIVERSITY IN THE UNITED STATES*; (MIDDLE) PETA; (BOTTOM) NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF COMMUNICABLE DISEASES

Guinea Worm Banished From India

India has finally conquered Guinea worm, making it the second disease after smallpox to be fully eradicated from the country. The disease, which affects mainly the rural poor, is now confined to just 12 African nations, according to an announcement last month by the World Health Organization (WHO).

Guinea worm, transmitted through contaminated drinking water, is known to researchers as the giant parasitic roundworm *Dracunculus medinensis*, a spaghetti-thin wriggler that can grow up to a meter long. The worm spawns in water, where its eggs are taken up and nurtured by *Cyclops*, an aquatic insect.

Goodbye to all that—Indian Guinea worm.

Fifty years ago, 25 million Indians suffered from dracunculiasis, a painful, untreatable condition that can cause crippling infections. But a worm-eradication campaign reduced the number of cases to 40,000 by the early 1980s. And Subhash Salunke, a WHO communicable diseases consultant based in New Delhi, says that "if all goes well in the next 4 to 5 years," the world will be Guinea worm–free by 2010.