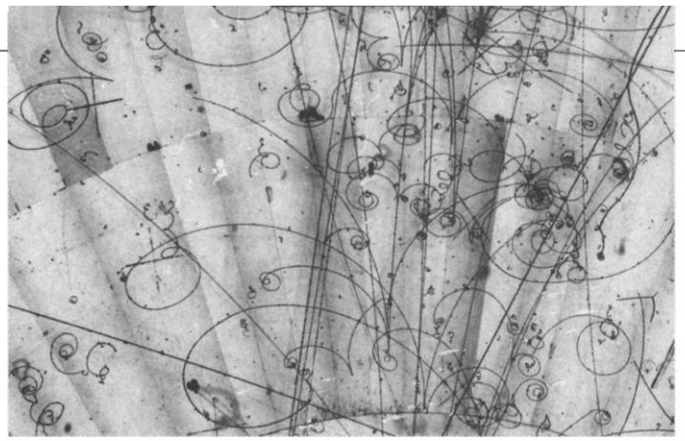


COOL IMAGES

Bubbling Along

Subatomic particles trace delicate curlicues inside a bubble chamber, a type of detector invented in the 1950s that enabled particle physicists to track their quarry. Charged particles zipping through superheated liquid hydrogen and neon in the chamber leave visible traces of tiny bubbles; a strong magnetic field causes negatively and positively charged particles to curl in opposite directions. Snapped in the 1980s at the Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory in Batavia, Illinois, the image appears on Particle Physics in the United Kingdom's Picture of the Week page,* which since 1997 has stacked up an eclectic archive of images from particle physics experiments past and present. Visitors can gawk at the guts of powerful particle detectors and accelerators, read about famous physicists, and check out the latest "event displays"—computerized color images of particle tracks that are today's equivalent of bubble chamber pictures.

* hepweb.rl.ac.uk/ppukpics/pr_pow.html

NET NEWS

Free Online University?

A software entrepreneur has pledged $100 million to launch an online university taught by the world's great thinkers that anyone could attend for free.

Michael Saylor, the billionaire CEO of MicroStrategy in Vienna, Virginia, described his plan to newspapers and in a *Wall Street Journal* op-ed piece last week. He wants to compile a "cyberlibrary" of lectures videotaped pro bono by thousands of leading educators and great minds—from investor Warren Buffet to Nobel Prize winners. Answers to students' typical questions and exams would also be put on the Web. For some students, Saylor writes, the cybercourses "might replace a traditional university," while for others they "would be a supplement." They would make an education available to people around the world who "aren't so lucky" as Saylor himself, who could afford to attend the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where he earned a bachelor's degree in aeronautical engineering and science, technology, and society.

Elements of Saylor's plan aren't novel—the U.K.'s Open University has mailed videotaped lectures to distance learners for decades, and hundreds of universities now offer online courses. But one new twist is that it would all be free. Observers, while intrigued, have many questions. Brian L. Hawkins of EDUCAUSE, a nonprofit that helps universities use technologies, wonders whether professors will want to give away their course material when they're now selling it to online education companies. The answer may come soon: Saylor plans to set up a nonprofit studio near Washington, D.C., and begin taping lectures within a few months.

NETWATCH

edited by JOCELYN KAISER

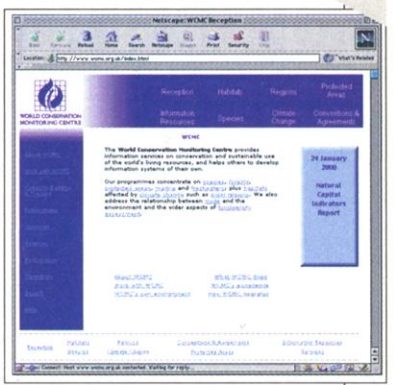
SITE VISIT

Conservation Central

Suppose you wanted to know which coral reefs were blighted in 1997 by black-band disease, a suffocating microbial mat. Or whether forests are dwindling faster in India or in neighboring Pakistan. Or find a certified sustainable logging operation in Bolivia.

Answers to these and many other conservation-related questions are contained in the multitude of graphs, maps, tables, and reports posted by the World Conservation Monitoring Centre in Cambridge, U.K. Designed to supply timely and impartial information, the site includes 30 searchable databases, from documents on international agreements protecting wildlife to the World Conservation Union's Red Lists of threatened plants and animals. But be prepared to dig, as some nuggets—such as the Arctic Bird Library, which offers range maps, photos, and recordings of bird calls—are tucked away or require registration (free, but processing can take days). The site's standout attraction is its detailed maps, ranging from protected areas by country to the global distribution of mangrove swamps. Some maps are interactive. For example, click "olive ridley" on a map of sea turtle nesting sites, and a constellation of olive dots springs up along the rim of the Indian Ocean. You can superimpose results for five other turtle species or download the raw data.

www.wcmc.org.uk



HOT PICKS

Anthro 101. Modern human variation, radiocarbon dating, human blood types, pidgin language, kinship: All are briefly covered in these 21 physical and social anthropology tutorials written at the level of a college introductory text. There's also a search engine, a glossary with audio pronunciations, and hyperlinks.
daphne.palomar.edu/anthro/tutorial.htm

Growing family trees. Used by everyone from evolutionary biologists to virologists, molecular phylogeny compares gene and protein sequences among organisms to map out family trees. This frequently updated site links to a surely all-inclusive list of about 170 phylogeny software packages.
evolution.genetics.washington.edu/phylip/software.html

Science ONLINE

The sequencing of virtually the entire genome of the fruit fly *Drosophila melanogaster*—the focus of this week's special issue of *Science*—constitutes a landmark in modern genetic studies. To add context to the *Drosophila* special issue, *Science* Online has gathered together articles from all six of our genome issues since 1995.
See www.sciencemag.org/feature/data/genomes/landmark.shl

Send Internet news and great Web site suggestions to netwatch@aaas.org

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