

## Keeping Felines Offline

Home-based workers, beware! You face an alarming, and growing, threat: cat computer crashing. Step out of the room for a moment, and your furry pal can wreak havoc on the keyboard, changing settings and damaging or even deleting files. But Chris Niswander, a Tucson software entrepreneur, has come up with a program that he claims will cat-proof your keyboard.

And none too soon. Niswander has a fund of horror stories about cat-computer interactions—such as the one about the Tucson veterinarian whose computer was trashed so badly that the hard drive had to be reformatted and all the software reinstalled. Another customer's pet added 40,000 entries to his spreadsheet records. "I've talked to people whose cats have semiregularly



Who needs a mouse?

done everything from logging onto the Internet to changing their appointments with psychotherapy clients," Niswander says.

The solution, he says, is "PawSense," a program that detects the special patterns created by a feline trampling or lounging on the keyboard. When that happens, the keyboard immediately shuts down and the monitor displays a message: "cat-like typing detected." The

program will broadcast a hissing noise or a discordant harmonica, an instrument cats apparently dislike. Or you can put in your own audio of a nasty dog barking.

Niswander, who has a company called Bitboost Systems, won't say how many copies of the software he's peddled so far, but he says he's clearly filling one of society's unmet needs. And he's hoping to fill another one soon—with "BabySense."

## Getting Down With NSF

Think peer review is tough? Try party review. The National Science Foundation (NSF) hopes to stage a December gala to cap its yearlong 50th anniversary celebration. But the National Science Board, which manages NSF's \$4 billion portfolio and usually conducts its affairs in a sedate, secretive, and soporific fashion, is discovering that arranging fun is no picnic.

The panel is trying to choose entertainment that would please everyone—and offend no one. Its travails became public on 4 May after an earlier closed meeting ended in what Carnegie Institution as-

tronomer Vera Rubin, chair of the party committee, described as "a state of disorder." "We considered the Capitol Steps," a local comedy group that does political satire, Rubin explained to the full board. "But we worried that they might say something embarrassing." The chief alternative—music—was equally contentious. Factions favoring ballroom dancing vied with supporters of a sit-down concert. Nor were people fired up by one member's proposal for a "science cabaret" featuring posters by winners of student science competitions. Another member hinted darkly that a mariachi band, which made a surprise appearance at a farewell dinner for former NSF director Neal Lane, could reappear as the default choice.

Beyond entertainment are two other potential land mines: location (the White House is a remote possibility) and the guest list. Any suggestions? Send them to mcehelsk@nsf.gov

The battling Mongolian dinosaurs have come to North America. Discovered in 1971, they make up one of the most famous fossils ever discovered: *Velociraptor mongoliensis* (long tail, at right),

### Primal Struggle

and *Protoceratops andrewsi*, who apparently died, Pompeii-style, locked in combat—perhaps smothered by a sudden sand flow triggered by a heavy rain. With its left hand, the predatory *Velociraptor* grips the head of the crouching *Protoceratops*, a shield-headed plant-eater, while embedding a deadly foot claw into the victim's neck. Meanwhile, *Protoceratops* appears to be retaliating by biting *Velociraptor's* right arm. The 80-million-year-old gladiators are featured in a show, "New Discoveries from Mongolia," running at New York City's American Museum of Natural History from 19 May to 29 October.



## Roots of Software

Can anyone remember when "software" wasn't on the tongue of every schoolchild? But it had to start somewhere. And Fred R. Shapiro, a librarian and etymologist at Yale Law School, thinks he's gotten to the source.

Shapiro sifted through the billions of words in JSTOR, an electronic journal archive, looking for the earliest use of "software." Lo and behold, he found first mention in a January 1958 article by Princeton statistician John Tukey, co-inventor of the fast Fourier transform, a mathematical technique. In the *American Mathematical Monthly*, Tukey wrote: "Today the 'software' comprising the carefully planned interpretive routines, compilers, and other aspects of automa-

tive programming are at least as important to the modern electronic calculator as its 'hardware' of tubes, transistors, wires, tapes, and the like." Shapiro, who reported the finding in the April-June *IEEE Annals of the History of Computing*, thinks JSTOR will revolutionize the study of scientific quotations and terminology. Mark Twain's *Autobiography*, for instance, which was published in 1924, is typically listed as the source for the quote "lies, damned lies, and statistics." But a JSTOR search reveals the saying in an 1896 statistics journal—in which an even earlier source is quoted. Shapiro predicts that JSTOR will be the source of new revelations as it adds older scientific journals, such as periodicals of the Royal Society of London going back to the 1600s.