

percent.” That’s still too high for physicists to break open the champagne (to declare a bona fide detection, they would need to push the probability of error below 0.001%), but it is enough to raise eyebrows.

If real, the tau-pair excess would signal the end of the Standard Model and the beginning of the supersymmetric era. However, the result may also be a fluke that will disappear with more data, as other supersymmetry sightings have done in the past. More data are due to be released on July 20, and the experiments will continue until September. That probably won’t be enough time to resolve the issue, the physicists say.

Ironically, if the death knell for the Standard Model comes, it probably won’t toll at LEP: This fall, the device is slated to be dismantled to make way for the Large Hadron Collider experiment.

—CHARLES SEIFE

## MOUNT GRAHAM

### Report Finds Squirrels Survived 3 Telescopes

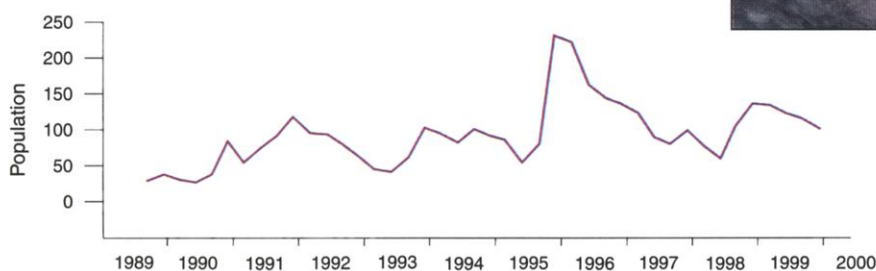
**TUCSON, ARIZONA**—For 15 years, Mount Graham has been a battleground for astronomers, who want to build a cluster of telescopes, and environmentalists, who say that such activity could wipe out an endangered

not these three telescopes.”

The UA-funded study, which the forest service approved when it allowed construction on 3.4 hectares of squirrel habitat near the 3300-meter summit, began in 1989. Since then Young has led a five-member team that conducted monthly, and then quarterly, censuses of the squirrels’ middens. They found that the population increased from a low of 33 squirrels in 1989 to 102 late last year, with a spike of 225 at mid-decade. The changes were based on food supply, and the pattern within the construction area paralleled that in a control site elsewhere on the mountain.

Both findings are exactly what Chris Smith, an evolutionary ecologist at Kansas State University in Manhattan with no stake in the outcome, would have predicted. “They looked at the narrow question of the observatory’s impact on the immediate population, did it thoroughly, and turned up no surprises,” he says. “Those squirrels get used to people easily.”

Proponents of the telescopes say the results vindicate their position—both past and future. “This report confirms what we have



**Holding on.** Census shows a rise in red squirrel population (*inset*) during construction of three telescopes on Mount Graham in southern Arizona.

subspecies of red squirrel. In 1988 Congress allowed construction of three telescopes on the mountain, a desert “sky island” northeast of here, prompting the U.S. Forest Service to order a long-range study to monitor the squirrel’s population. The results are now in. But the findings—that the work to date has had “no significant effect” on the rare rodents—have done little to resolve a debate that is expected to heat up again next year when the University of Arizona (UA) seeks permission to build four more telescopes.

“We tried hard to find something that would display a negative effect, but we couldn’t,” says UA population ecologist Paul Young, who directed the 10-year, \$2.5 million monitoring program. “What really determined what happened were variations in the [pine]cone crops the squirrels depend on in the fir, spruce, and mixed conifer forest,

been saying all along, that the telescopes would not affect the squirrels at all,” says Buddy Powell, associate director of the UA’s Steward Observatory, a partner in the Mount Graham facilities. Powell also believes the study bolsters plans to build additional telescopes on an adjacent site. “It suggests the squirrels would not be harmed by four more,” Powell says.

Environmentalists, however, disagree with Powell on both points. Robin Silver, conservation director of the Southwest Center for Biological Diversity in Phoenix and longtime opponent of the telescopes, says the data are tainted by Young’s university financing and the lack of outside review. “They should have given this project to another university or an outside company,” Silver says.

Peter Marshall, a San Francisco-based ecologist who produced the original envi-

ronmental impact statement for the observatory project in 1986, disputes Powell’s view that the monitoring justifies more telescopes. Instead, Marshall, who leads Scientists for the Preservation of Mount Graham, believes that the sharp fluctuations demonstrate the squirrel’s long-term vulnerability to environmental assaults. “There are so many uncontrollable forces threatening these squirrels, from cone crop failures and forest fires to tree diseases and windfalls,” Marshall says. “The question is whether there’s room to add the controllable impact of destroying more forest to build more telescopes—and this study doesn’t answer that.” To underline their concern, on 30 June Marshall’s and Silver’s groups filed a federal lawsuit to block construction of a buried 37-kilometer power line to the telescopes.

Young agrees that his results don’t represent a green light for astronomers. “There hasn’t been any significant impact from the

first three telescopes, but that doesn’t mean we should build more,” he says. “I definitely think the red squirrel is in a precarious place. ... This is an island species, and in general island species go extinct.”

The next major battle over the mountain

will be a formal proposal to the forest service to build other instruments, including possibly a wide-field camera and a 6.5-meter telescope. But that won’t be submitted for at least a year, until work is completed on the third and largest current project, the \$83.5 million Large Binocular Telescope. In the meantime, Young—who is preparing to hand off responsibility for the monitoring project and take on another position—doesn’t expect to have the last word. “Something tells me both sides will continue to have a field day with the data,” he says.

—MARK MURO

Mark Muro writes from Tucson.

## EUROPEAN SCIENCE

### Pathogens Lab Chief Stripped of Duties

**PARIS**—Europe’s most advanced high-security pathogen lab has claimed its first human casualty—and it hasn’t even opened for business. On 28 June, the Marcel Merieux Foundation, which funded the construction of the \$8 million facility in Lyons, banned lab director Susan Fisher-Hoch from the premises and launched legal proceedings to dismiss her. Fisher-Hoch’s most egregious offense, it appears, was speaking with the press.

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