

IMAGES

Something of Significance

With wildfires still blazing across the western United States and hurricane season upon us, it's an apt time to point your browser to the Operational Significant Event Imagery* site at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. That's where we found this striking view of smoke rising from fires in Montana and Idaho on 14 August. "Significant events," according to site leader and hydrologist George Stephens, are "roughly defined as an environmental event which has significant impact on human life or property" or is of broad scientific interest—and that can be seen with the agency's weather satellites. Offerings range from last year's total solar eclipse over Europe to dust storms over the Arabian Desert to calving icebergs in Antarctica. Join an e-mail list to receive links to each day's harvest of images.

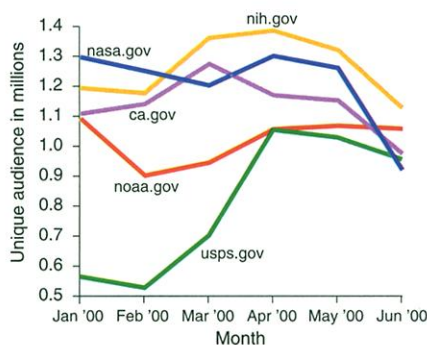
*www.osei.noaa.gov

NET NEWS

Health and Space Top Dot-Govs

It seems that Internet surfers are most interested in the personal—and the universal. A recent ranking shows that Web pages created by the National Institutes of Health (NIH)—home to useful medical information—and space-exploring NASA are the most popular government-sponsored offerings among home-based computer users. The numbers come from Nielsen/NetRatings, which has attached monitors to over 57,000 home computers to track their owners' Web wanderings. The company points out that ratings tend to fluctuate: The Internal Revenue Service's hits shoot up in April during tax time, while NASA dusted the competition during the July 1997 rover landing on Mars.

Surprisingly, only 20% of NIH's hits are on the National Library of Medicine, which runs the PubMed abstracts database. Institute pages with fact sheets on diseases also attract lots of traffic from the public, says NIH Webmaster Dennis Rodrigues. Like a NASA spokesperson, he says his agency doesn't take the ratings too seriously. But "if we dropped off the top 10, we'd wonder what we were doing wrong."



HOT PICKS

Spin city. An indispensable part of the biochemist's toolkit is NMR spectroscopy, a technique for identifying molecules by the nuclear spin of their hydrogen and carbon atoms. BioMagResBank holds structural NMR data for over 1640 proteins and other biomolecules, from single amino acids to exotic neurotoxins, along with links ranging from NMR backgrounders to software and researchers' home pages. www.bmrb.wisc.edu

NETWATCH

edited by JOCELYN KAISER

Androids exist! And not just in movies. To follow the history and current status of efforts to make humanlike robots, consult Android World, created by a fan of the field. The site links to scores of projects, from NASA's anthropomorphic space robots to Honda's P2 robot, which weighs 460 pounds and can walk up and down stairs. Entertaining miscellanea include Isaac Asimov's three laws of robots. www.androidworld.com

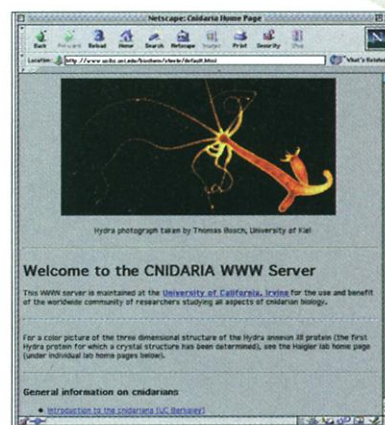
SITE VISITS

Jellyfish Junction

Most people think of jellyfish and their kin mainly as a stinging hazard at the beach. But to biologists, their simple construction and behavior make these baglike creatures a boon for studying the evolution of basic molecular processes. Indeed, interest is strong enough that during the 5 years biologist Rob Steele has run the Cnidaria (pronounced "nydaria") WWW Server, he has gotten inquiries about jellyfish, corals, and other stinging marine organisms from both experts and the simply curious. A researcher for a mystery writer even asked how long it would take one kind of poisonous jelly to kill a person.

Steele, who works at the University of California, Irvine, has stocked the site with a mix of onsite documents and links. One leads to a sister site at Yale on hydrozoa, a widely studied group of cnidaria that includes Hydra and the Portuguese man o' war. Other offerings range from genetic information and research methods, to pretty cnidarian photos and a discussion forum. Users can look up the genes involved in intercellular signal transduction and even tips on storing cnidaria in ethanol for DNA analysis. Moving to topics beyond the lab, one newsgroup posting discusses how a Korean power plant might eliminate jellyfish blooms near its cooling water intake pipes. The site's biggest payoff, says Steele, is that it has helped make a relatively small group of researchers spread over the world "more accessible as a community."

www.ucihs.uci.edu/biochem/steele/default.html



ScienceONLINE

Science's Next Wave wants to know what ethical issues you think science and technology will raise in the 21st century. Stop by to fill out an international survey on the ethical challenges posed by advances such as information technology and the coming deluge of genetic data. The answers will help organizations such as AAAS (Science's publisher) develop programs and activities that address these critical issues. nextwave.sciencemag.org

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