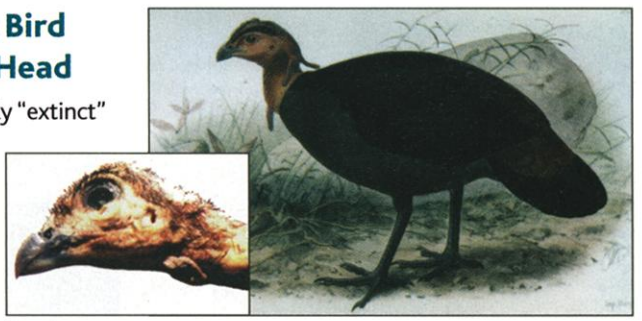
Long-Lost Bird Raises Its Head

Yet another reputedly "extinct" species has made a reappearance—this time as leftovers from a pig hunter's supper on an island off New Guinea.



Drawing of Brush-Turkey; newly found head (*inset*).

Bruijn's Brush-Turkey is one of 22 species of megapodes, which are distinguished by their unusual habit of incubating their eggs in warm soils or mounds of rotting leaves. Last seen on the island of Waigeu in 1938, the turkey has been the object of a search by a Dutch-Indonesian expedition headed by Kees Heij of the Natural History Museum in Rotterdam. On 23 February, they got lucky: A Waigeu hunter brought a head and some bones—the remains of a bush dinner—to Kris Tindige, an Indonesian member of the expedition. He and Heij are now scouring the densely forested island for further evidence of the elusive bird.

Hello Mr. Chip

Pioneering chip couple.

An unconventional professor at the United Kingdom's University of Reading hopes to become the first individual to transmit electrical impulses—conveying touch, movement, pain, and even emotion—between his nervous system and a computer.

Next fall, cyberneticist Kevin Warwick plans to have a glass-encapsulated silicon chip and radio transmitter implanted in his upper left arm. Pins injected into the membrane surrounding the nerve fibers will feed signals directly between the computer and his nervous system. The exercise builds upon a 1998 experiment in which he sported an implant that allowed a computer to track his movements and respond by greeting him or opening doors.

Warwick, who has a support team of 20—including neural prosthesis and robotics experts from the universities of Alberta and Delaware—says the group will first record signals produced by his muscle movements and then play them back in hopes of electrically stimulating the same movements. If that works, other types of signals will be tested, including pain, and even the sensation of being drunk. Ultimately Warwick's wife Irena is to get an implant as well, and the research team will attempt to transmit sensation—a headache, for example—from spouse to spouse.

Warwick says the work is eminently practical, opening up a future where "cyberdrugs" could be substituted for real ones for a range of conditions including depression and pain, or to stimulate muscle movements in neuromuscular diseases.

But while cyberphiles may be thrilled by his pioneering activities, other scientists have thrown cold water on Warwick's scheme. Geraint Wiggins, chair of the Society for the Study of Artificial Intelligence and the Simulation of Behaviour, calls it "unoriginal, scientifically insignificant, and certainly a good deal less amazing than the real medical research which preempts it."

Honor for German Engineer Questioned

The Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) is holding fast against critics who don't like the fact that one of its annual prizes—the 20-year-old Erwin Marx award honoring the inventor of the "Marx generator"—is named for a German engineer linked with the Nazis.

In a 1993 biography, historian and engineer Helmut Maier revealed Marx's membership in both the SA storm troopers and the Nazi Party, as well as details of his wartime research, including work on radar-jamming technology and a high-voltage generator for an underground power grid. Marx died in 1980.

Maier has written the IEEE protesting the award, which he found out about only last year. Marx was "not just a patriotic engineer," he says, "but a member of the Nazi engineering and science bureaucracy." Technology historian Eric Schatzberg of the University of Wisconsin, Madison, last week supported Maier with an appeal posted on the Holocaust History List Web site (www2.h-net.msu.edu/~holoweb).

The IEEE is so far unmoved. Its board says its ethics committee did a "thorough investigation" of Maier's complaints and opted not to rethink the award, as there is "no evidence ... that Marx participated in any immoral war crimes or atrocities."

Engineer Marx.

All's Well That Ends Well

Which is better: a short, happy life, or a longer one with a not-so-happy ending? People's assessments of a life appear to be based far more on quality than on duration, psychologists report in the March issue of *Psychological Science*.

Ed Diener and colleagues at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, told groups of subjects, both young and middle-aged, various versions of the life of a fictional person named Jen. In one version, Jen lives a very happy life, dying suddenly at 25. In another, she is happy till 25, then lives five more somewhat less happy years. In other tales, Jen lives longer but is miserable most of the time. The subjects preferred the short, happy life to the longer, less happy one, or the sad, long life that brightened at the end to the short, sad life. Both responses are "counterintuitive," Diener says, because they reject "the economic principle that people choose the most [cumulative] good." Instead, they choose the life with the highest average amount of happiness.

Princeton psychologist Daniel Kahneman says this conforms with other research showing that when people think of past events, they "tend to evaluate by the peak and by the end, and to be quite insensitive to how long it lasted." A vivid example, he notes, comes from a study of people who underwent painful colonoscopy exams. They recalled an exam ending with mild discomfort as less unpleasant than a shorter exam that concluded with greater discomfort.

CREDITS: (TOP) J. KEULEMANS, IN E. OUSTALET, *MONOGRAPHIE DES OISEAUX DE LA FAMILLE DES MÉGAPODIIDÉS*, 1881; (INSET) WAIGEU EXPEDITION; (BOTTOM) COURTESY H. MAIER