

## Like Mother, Like Son

Children learn a lot from their mothers. And if mum happens to be a chimpanzee who reads kanji—one form of written



Precocious Ayumu snuggles with mom.

Japanese—her infant may pick up the skill, too. That appears to be the case with Ayumu, a baby chimp at Kyoto University's Pri-

mate Research Institute whose mom, Ai, has been taught to read several dozen kanji characters.

Ever since his birth last April, Ayumu has watched Ai during her daily sessions at a touch-screen computer, where she matches colors with their kanji and performs other tasks for fruit rewards. She has also learned to work for coins, which she uses to buy fruit from a nearby vending machine.

One day in February, as Ai was buying fruit, Ayumu jumped to the monitor, touched a white square that starts the trial, and was shown the kanji for brown. He then had to choose between a brown square and a pink one. Ayumu climbed onto a

What do primatologist Jane Goodall, ex-Soviet chief Mikhail Gorbachev, movie star Harrison Ford, and retired newscaster Walter Cronkite have in common? They're all worried about global warming. They've joined six others—including ecologist E. O. Wilson, cosmologist Stephen Hawking, and gene-trepreneur J. Craig Venter—in signing *Time* magazine's "essay," which this week is a letter urging President Bush to support the Kyoto agreement to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The other signers: ex-President Jimmy Carter, astronaut-politician John Glenn, and philanthropist George Soros.

## Stellar Climate Plea

tray on the wall to reach the brown square. He then grabbed his coin.

"It was astonishing," says Tetsuro Matsuzawa, a primatologist at the institute. Although his team had predicted that Ayumu would start playing with the monitor at some point, they did not expect such a polished performance by the 10-month-old neophyte. "He had never touched the screen before," notes Matsuzawa.

Ayumu's logical leap may help the researchers figure out how chimps pass along acquired skills, such as use of rocks to crack nuts and sticks to extract termites. It suggests that infants pick up such skills solely by observation and don't have to be actively coached by their parents.

Ayumu's single trip to the touch screen isn't enough to confirm that hypothesis, says Frans de Waal, a primatologist at Yerkes Regional Primate Research Center at Emory University in Atlanta. If Matsuzawa "has set it up such that the human trainer has no influence," Ayumu's feat would be revealing. The toddler, however, still needs to prove that "this was not a chance event."

## Press 1 for Parody

An anonymous prankster is prompting grins and grimaces at the Department of Energy's Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in California with a fake phone greeting currently floating about the Internet. The National Ignition Facility is a controversial \$3.9 billion megalaser that is helping the lab, originally dedicated to designing nuclear weapons, stay solvent (*Science*, 18 August 2000, p. 1126). Excerpts:

"Thank you for calling Lawrence Livermore Natural (*sic*) Laboratory. None of our scientists and engineers are busy right now, so please listen carefully to the following options. Remember, your money is very important to us, so please stay on the line and you will be helped in the order of your potential funding level.

"If you are having trouble with your toaster or can opener or other simple household devices, press 1 for the engineering directorate.

"If you need to identify some little rock your kid brought home, press 2 for the energy and earth sciences directorate. ...

"If you have marginal personal skills, cannot read or write, or have recently suffered a traumatic head injury, press 4 and ask about jobs for safety engineers.

"If you are an unemployed laser physicist ... an unemployed mechanical engineer, draftsman, carpenter, shoe salesman, or have experience as a Wal-Mart greeter, press 5 and ask about the National Ignition Facility. ...

"If you need a multiply targeted supersonic reentry vehicle and matched set of thermonuclear warheads, hang up and dial 505-667-5061 for Los Alamos National Laboratory.

"Thank you."

## A Very Old Tick

It may look like it just crawled out of your belly button, but this tick is actually 90 million years old. Discovered in an amber outcropping in a vacant lot in New Jersey, it is more than twice the age of the oldest tick fossil ever found. The specimen, a soft tick in the larval stage, was found by a team from New York City's American Museum of Natural History and is described by Hans Klompen of Ohio State University, Columbus, and the museum's David Grimaldi in a recent issue of the *Annals of the Entomological Society of America*. Ticks are thought to have originated at least 100 million years ago in South America. *Carios jerseyi* probably made it to North America on a seabird.



## Wheels of Creativity

The bicycle ridden by Indian economist Amartya Sen, who won a Nobel Prize in 1998, is one of the artifacts featured in "Cultures of Creativity," the first exhibit of the yet-to-be-built Nobel Museum. The show celebrating the centennial of the prizes opened this month in the Stockholm Stock Exchange.

