Wolves Return to Germany

The land of the Brothers Grimm is once again home to wolves. A century and a half after hunters first wiped out *Canis lupus*, the species is again breeding in Germany's eastern hinterlands.

Occasional wolves have been spotted in the region over the last 2 decades, usually after hunters or traffic killed them. But there have been no known permanent residents in Germany since the mid-1800s. Last year, however, Saxony foresters noticed a pair living in a wooded military training ground. And this summer those two were accompanied by four yearlings and two pups—apparently the first wolves born in Germany in over a century.

Wolves have returned to Germany's eastern frontier after a 150-year absence.

The secured zone is a "perfect habitat, with lots of prey" and few bothersome humans, says Frank Mörschel, a wildlife biologist with the World Wide Fund for Nature in Frankfurt am Main. He predicts that the pack's territory will expand. Already the wolves are roaming in an area twice the size of the training ground, says forestry official Rolf Röder.

All's well so far, but Mörschel warns wildlife officials to be ready in case the wolves start preying on local farm animals. With the tale of Little Red Riding Hood still fresh in the people's minds, he says, "public opinion can change quickly."

IOM Gets New Chief

The Institute of Medicine (IOM) has named Harvey Fineberg, former provost of Harvard University, as its seventh president. Fineberg will succeed Kenneth Shine, who faces mandatory retirement next June after two 6-year terms, the IOM announced on 8 November.

Fineberg

Fineberg, 56, stepped down from Harvard's second-ranking job last June after he was passed over for the presidency. He had a lengthy tenure in Cambridge as an administrator, including 4 years as provost and 13 years as dean of the university's School of Public Health. He also earned a medical degree and a doctorate in public policy from Harvard.

Fineberg says it's too early to spell out specific plans, but he wants to address the broad role of information technology in health care, from using "evidence-based" medicine in clinical care to making medical information accessible to the public. He's also eager to lend a hand on bioterrorism issues. "It's a compelling time to be in Washington," he says.

Barry Bloom, who followed Fineberg as dean of Harvard's School of Public Health, says Fineberg sharpened the school's focus on improving the quality of health care and understanding how economic factors contribute to a person's health. "He was key to raising issues of the underserved and the inequities of health [care]," says Bloom.

Internet Asteroid Clash

A new study concluding that astronomers have overstated the risk of an Earth-asteroid wreck is taking a pounding of its own in an Internet parody.

In the November *Astronomical Journal*, Princeton astronomer Zeljko Ivezic used the latest images of the asteroid belt to calculate that the chance of an asteroid hitting Earth is 1 in 5000 every century. That is one-third lower than previous guesses, prompting Ivezic to issue a widely covered press release saying that earthlings should feel a lot safer.

But other doomsday prognosticators say Ivezic's study is headed for a crash landing. In an anonymous parody press release entitled "Chance of Being Eaten by Wild Animals Greatly Downgraded," an acidic critic ridicules Ivezic's methods. The spoof, posted on 12 November on a scholarly e-mail list called the Cambridge Conference Network, argues that using the number of chunks in the asteroid belt to calculate the likelihood of Armageddon is akin to using the number of hippos in Africa to estimate the chance of being chewed by a wild animal in North America. The parody is thinly veiled partisanship for a second approach to collision prediction used by previous studies: directly counting only asteroids that have left the belt and become potential threats.

Ivezic says the posting is "amusing." His colleagues' scrutiny, he adds, improves the science.

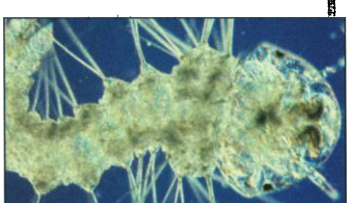
Global Warming in the Genes

For the first time, scientists have found evidence that global warming may be influencing an organism's genes. New research shows that over 30 years, one mosquito species' winter dormancy period—a genetically controlled trait—has shrunk as Earth has warmed.

The mosquito *Wyeomyia smithii* spends its early life in the water-filled leaves of the pitcher plant. Larvae become dormant before dangerous cold weather hits and wake in the spring after the threat of frost has passed. In order to anticipate future temperature, the larvae monitor day length. In the early 1970s, biologist William Bradshaw of the University of Oregon, Eugene, demonstrated that the insects are genetically programmed to wake up after specific periods of exposure to light.

In the 6 November early edition of the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, Bradshaw reports that global warming has shifted the mosquito's schedule. Comparing larvae collected in the field in 1972 and 1996, he found that more recent mosquitoes require 14 fewer minutes. That suggests that the mosquitoes have adapted to spring weather that is arriving earlier than in the past.

Bradshaw's study is "very impressive" because it ties a clear genetic trait to warming trends, says biologist D. Liane Cochran-Stafira of Saint Xavier University in Chicago.



Mosquito larvae feel the heat.

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