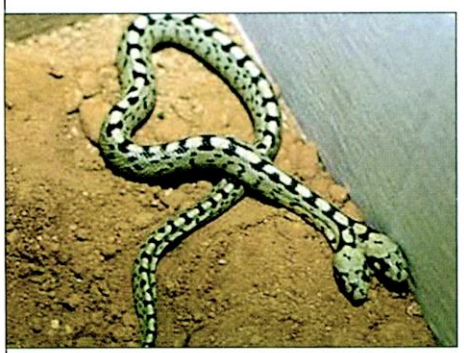
Double Header

The discovery of a two-headed snake has stirred up excitement among Spanish researchers, who are trying to figure out how to take advantage of the oddity.

A farmer found the 2-month-old, 20-centimeter-long ladder snake (*Elaphe scalaris*) last month in a rocky area in the village of Pinoso and handed it over to the Spanish Herpetological Society. Biologist Enrique Font of the University of Valencia plans to conduct neuroimaging studies to study how the heads cooperate in targeting and capturing prey, and what role the two brains play in regulating hunger and other behaviors. He also hopes to observe how a female snake would respond to a two-headed suitor.



Dicephalic slitherer.

Gordon Burghardt, a herpetologist at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, says the Spanish snake will be particularly interesting if it turns out to have only one digestive system. He says he had a snake subject that had two stomachs as well as two heads, which made it hard to tell whether signals that tell a snake it is full come from the stomach or the throat. Burghardt and Font will be putting their heads together to study the latest curiosity.

Cheering for Neutrinos

For neutrinophiles, Lead (pronounced "Leed") is where it's at these days. A year ago, scientists chose the small South Dakota town as the best site for a new underground laboratory for studying the powerful particles (*Science*, 15 February, p. 1213). On 23 February, more than 60 people braved an ice storm to pile into the Stampill Saloon for a celebration of Neutrino Day.

Partygoers competed in neutrino races (blowing a feather down the bar), a neutrino catching contest (soap bubbles), and unanimously reelected Tracy Thacker, a local newspaper employee who came decked out in a red-and-white cape, as the year's Ms. Neutrino.

But unease lingered beneath the merrymaking, as the lab's future is still in doubt. The company that owns the 2700-meter-deep mine where it would be located hasn't decided if it will donate the land, and the National Science Foundation hasn't approved the $300 million project. "We're in limbo," says Karen Everett of the Lead Chamber of Commerce. Still, the campaign to snag the economically valuable project has had its benefits, she says: "Every Lead kindergartner now knows what a neutrino is."

Ocean R_x

The Jamaican coral reefs that marine biologist Jeremy Jackson studied only 20 years ago have disappeared. "So what do you do about it?" he asks. For Jackson, the answer is make a movie. The Scripps Institution of Oceanography scientist has teamed up with Randy Olson, an academic scientist turned filmmaker, to create a 7-minute short looking at the causes of marine crises. Called "Rediagnosing the Oceans," it suggests that overfishing decades or centuries ago is a major cause of current marine declines.

Most documentaries about ocean life "are like a drug: They put people to sleep," Jackson told a bar full of marine scientists at the film's Boston premier last month. In a bid to keep their audience awake, Jackson and Olson made four brief spots that use dramatic reenactments, animated creatures, and a lively soundtrack to explore four major calamities: the collapse of the Chesapeake Bay's oyster beds; the plummet of Stellar's sea lions in the North Pacific; the disappearance of New England kelp beds; and the decline of Caribbean sea grass environments. Although not all researchers would agree, Jackson contends that each problem was primarily caused by overfishing by humans—not pollution or environmental changes.

Jackson is planning to distribute the film—made with $25,000 from Scripps and time donated by Hollywood talent—to aquaria, schools, and on the Internet (see www.oceanRx.org). Eventually, he hopes to expand it into a 6-hour series for cable television.

Film says sea turtle declines mean they don't "mow" sea-grass beds as they used to.

Darwin's Bottles

The bicentennial of Charles Darwin's birth isn't till 2009. But London's Natural History Museum is already getting ready. The museum has announced that next September it will open a new Darwin Centre, where thousands of bottled specimens hitherto inaccessible to the public will be put on display.

Fish curator Oliver Crimmen with some of Darwin's fish specimens.

The "spirit collection," as it's called because of the alcohol used as a preservative, comprises 450,000 jars containing some 22 million specimens. In addition to Darwin's collections—some bottled in rum from the ship's larder—they range from sea bass collected in 1768 by Captain Cook in Australia to newly discovered Borneo river sharks.

The museum says the center will "radically change the perception of what a museum is." It will be a "working space" where visitors can interact with scientists and go behind the scenes. A later phase of the project will add a building for insect and plant collections.

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