

## Rare Captive Dolphin Dies

Chinese scientists and conservationists are mourning the death last week of the world's only captive Yangtze River dolphin. Its death also highlights the dismal record to date of attempts to preserve this most endangered white-finned species.

Qiqi, a 25-year-old male, has lived since age 2 at the Wuhan Institute of Hydrobiology after being fished out of the Yangtze River. Scientists were unable to find him a mate, however, and their efforts to set up a conservation and breeding facility in a

secluded portion of the river in Hubai Province have so far been futile. "It is not easy to raise a Baiqi [its Chinese name] in an artificial environment," says Zhang Xianfeng, a whale researcher at the institute, who says Qiqi has provided valuable information on the physiology and behavior of the dolphin and its habitat.

Although official statistics put the number of Baiqi at slightly less than 100, an extensive monitoring program has recorded only five to seven dolphins each season.

The institute has created a foundation to raise money to continue its captive-breeding efforts, in hopes of preventing extinction of a species under siege from heavy river transportation, excessive fishing, and pollution.



A congressional spending panel has scolded the Smithsonian Institution for selling its scientific heritage to the highest bidder and for being too generous to its top administrators. Its comments coincide with an outside review of the institution's research programs (*Science*, 13 July 2001, p. 194).

The House Appropriations Committee this month ordered museum officials to "renegotiate" an agreement with aerospace giant Lockheed Martin that, in exchange for \$10 million, bumped the name of space pioneer and former Smithsonian secretary Samuel P. Langley off the museum's IMAX Theatre. The name change, which the legislators called "particularly incomprehensible," is one of several that have recently been made in response to big donations.

The House panel is also upset with the fact that 29 Smithsonian executives earn more than the \$161,200 paid to U.S. Cabinet secretaries, with Secretary Lawrence Small topping the list at \$588,000, plus \$85,000 in bonuses. Such largesse, although legal, "weakens the public's belief that the organization has justified its need for increased taxpayer support," say the legislators.

The Smithsonian will not comment on the IMAX name change. Current procedures regarding donations guarantee that "the public interest is protected," says spokesperson David Umansky. As for the salaries, Umansky says they are "comparable to major universities, other museums, and foundations."

In fact, according to a survey published last year by the Association of Science-Technology Centers, the average salary for science and technology museum directors is \$122,444.

## Perfumed Nests for Corsican Birds

Humans use lavender to keep moths from destroying woolen garments. Now it appears that birds resort to similar tactics. A new study reveals that tiny birds on the French island of Corsica may decorate nests with sweet-smelling herbs to create a pest-free environment.

Many ecologists have taken the view that smell plays little role in birds' lives, says Marcel M. Lambrechts of the Functional and Evolutionary Ecology Center in Montpellier, France. Birds that add aromatic material to their nests, some scientists argued, do it for visual effect to attract mates.

Now, in the July issue of *Ecology Letters*, Lambrechts and his colleagues report that Corsican blue tits (*Parus caeruleus*) incorporate fragments of 10 or more fragrant plants including yarrow, lavender, mint, and lemon balm into their nests. While the parents were out shopping, the scientists removed all fresh plant material from 64 nests of blue tits and their chicks. They then hid pungent plant material—which could be smelled but not seen—in half the nests. The birds coming home to herbless nests flew off to collect fresh material, whereas those in nests with the hidden herbs didn't react.

Lambrechts views the results as the first evidence that "a free-ranging animal uses plants and olfaction for the continuous maintenance of an aromatic environment during the nestling stage." The scientists say many of the herbs tits collect possess chemical properties that kill or repel mites, bacteria, and viruses.

"This study clearly demonstrates that blue tits can smell," comments Simon Griffith, a zoologist at the University of Oxford, U.K. The behavior could be an innovation unique to Corsican tits, adds Bart Kempenaers of the Max Planck Research Center for Ornithology in Seewiesen, Germany—perhaps because they face greater pest threats or because aromatic plants are more available than in other parts of Europe.



Tit snuggles in spicy nest.

## Yes, This Is Art

It's a sculpture with animal bones and neon called "Red Marrow," and it's by Hunter O'Reilly, an artist with a Ph.D. in genetics who teaches biology and art at the University of Wisconsin, Parkside. An exhibit of her works, containing paintings and digital works "reinterpreting biotechnology as art," opens in September at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

