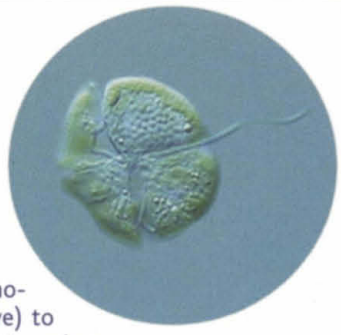
NETWATCH

edited by MITCH LESLIE



EDUCATION

On the Trail of Rogue Algae

You don't want the dainty dinoflagellate *Karenia brevis* (above) to join you for dinner. The marine alga, which can contaminate fish and shellfish, exudes a potent toxin that can cause diarrhea and vomiting. Find out more about the five main kinds of algal poisoning in U.S. waters at the Web site Toxic and Harmful Algal Blooms, hosted by the nonprofit Bigelow Laboratory for Ocean Sciences in West Boothbay Harbor, Maine.

The site describes the algal malefactors behind deadly blooms such as ciguatera fish poisoning and paralytic shellfish poisoning, explains their effects on humans and other organisms, and uncovers the chemical details of their poisons. Species within the phytoplankton genus *Alexandrium*, the culprits in paralytic shellfish poisoning, can taint shellfish with saxitoxin, a toxin that the United States once stockpiled as a potential chemical weapon. It slams the sodium channels in nerve cells and can paralyze an unlucky diner's breathing muscles. Even if they don't leak toxins, algae can still kill. The brown tides common off the East and Gulf coasts are population explosions of *Aureococcus* algae. They spin a gooey, mucuslike material that can choke some filter-feeding aquatic animals.

www.bigelow.org/hab/index.html

DATABASE

Secrets of the Seabed

Looking for information on the makeup of North Atlantic seafloor rocks? How about the composition of volcanic deposits in the Galápagos Islands? Bore into GEOROC, a geological chemistry database hosted by the University of Mainz in Germany. GEOROC's creators gleaned from the literature chemical measurements for nearly 100,000 igneous rock samples collected from the ocean floor and from islands around the globe. The site provides concentrations of common and trace elements and of radioactive isotopes, and you can customize your search by element, location, and type of formation.

georoc.mpch-mainz.gwdg.de

EDUCATION

Free MIT Site Debuts

Bucking the trend in for-profit distance education, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology announced last year that it would share nearly all of its course materials on a free Web site (*Science*, 13 April 2001, p. 175). This pilot site premieres the first installment of resources for the project, known as OpenCourseWare. Those interested can choose among more than 30 undergraduate and graduate classes in 17 departments. The offerings range from standard handouts—syllabuses, lecture notes, and the like—to fluid dynamics software and even a complete textbook on transportation planning. You can't take courses through the OpenCourseWare project. However, professors at other universities can adapt the materials for their own classes, and students can mine them for background information.

ocw.mit.edu

IMAGES

Orchestrating a Fly

Like musicians, the genes that mold a growing fly need to have exquisite timing. Starting or stopping at the wrong point can lead to discordant results. Researchers at the Berkeley *Drosophila* Genome Project have been reading the genetic score of fruit fly development by using RNA probes to tag parts of the embryo that express a particular gene. This new site holds digital images showing the activity patterns of 1354 of the fly's 13,600 genes. The report for each gene shows where the gene is turned on during different stages of development and also presents DNA microarray expression profiles. The site's creators plan to post new findings about every 3 months.

www.fruitfly.org/cgi-bin/ex/insitu.pl

EXHIBITS

Recorded History

If you're of a certain age, you might remember antiquities such as the Betamax player, the eight-track tape, and maybe even that 1940s wonder, the wire recorder. Follow the rise and fall of recording technologies with this timeline compiled by historian Steve Schoenherr of the University of San Diego. It tracks developments in audio and video from Thomas Edison's first recording of human speech in 1877 to today's giant-screen IMAX films and desktop film editing. Schoenherr also delves into topics such as the history of loudspeakers and the transition from mammoth carbon microphones to smaller electronic models. The pages brim with photos, explanatory diagrams, contemporary articles and advertisements, and sound files of early recordings.

history.acusd.edu/gen/recording/notes.html

Send site suggestions to netwatch@aaas.org. Archive: www.sciencemag.org/netwatch

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