ticides are traditionally used to kill the critters, says Jeffrey Lockwood, an entomologist at the University of Wyoming. But the USDA, hoping to steer away from chemicals, wanted to test a biological weapon: It planned to unleash grasshopper-munching Australian wasps onto rangelands.

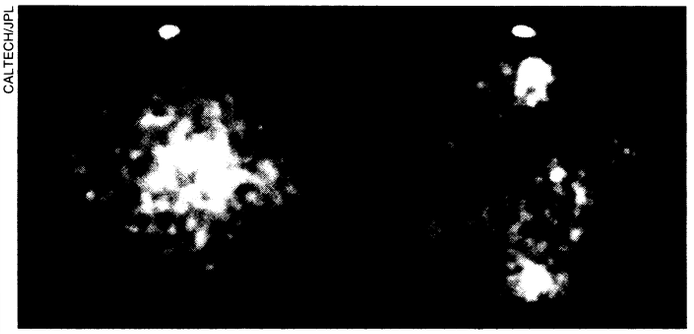
On hearing of the plan last spring, graduate students in Lockwood's course, "Insect Population Biology," took action: They drafted a document challenging the USDA to assess the ramifications of introducing an exotic species into an established ecosystem. "Surprisingly to me, [USDA officials] weren't aware of the ecological consequences," Lockwood says. For example, he says, the wasps might also scarf up beneficial weed-eating hoppers.

Late last summer USDA put its wasp plan on hold. An official says the students' report was only "one of many incentives" that led to the decision. But a USDA memo suggests their initiative carried more sting than that. It stated that the Wyoming work was "so compelling that the USDA must seriously reconsider its initiative of importing exotic parasites...." Lockwood says there's a lesson here: that while broad-spectrum insecticides should be curbed, biological controls don't "automatically wear a white hat."

## An Ice Cap on the Hottest Planet?

Astronomer Martin Slade of the Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) recalls that when he and his colleagues were trying to figure out the nature of a newly discovered bright spot at the north pole of Mercury—the solar system's hottest planet—"our first reaction was: It can't be ice, so what is it?" But on further reflection, Slade, Duane Muhleman, and Bryan Butler of the California Institute of Technology, and Raymond Jurgens of JPL decided an ice cap on Mercury isn't such a crazy idea after all.

CALTECH/JPL



**Radar images of Mercury.** *White spot at the top signals possible subsurface ice cap.*

The notion seemed plausible when the researchers considered the fact that Mercury's polar bright spot appeared in radar maps rather than in conventional telescope images, so any ice could be below the surface (where radar can penetrate) and thus be somewhat protected from the rigors of space. It would also be preserved by the relative cold of Mercury's polar regions. Because the planet lacks seasons, the equatorial areas of the planet are baked by the sun to 430°C while the poles are a chilly -148°C.

But "ice is still somewhat of an uncomfortable explanation," says Slade. It's better than conventional ones that invoke a rough, rocky surface, but "it's hard to know why the ices didn't evaporate" over billions of years. While that question is being investigated in the artificial chill of the laboratory, the radar astronomers will be looking toward Mercury again. They think they caught a glimpse last summer of a second spot, this time at the South Pole.

## Relaying Science to the People

A new bridge between science and society is being established in the form of an international quarterly, *Public Understanding of Science*, to be launched in January by the Science Museum in London in association with IOP Publishing.

The prime mover behind the journal is John Durant, the museum's assistant director and visiting professor of the history and public understanding of science at Imperial College in London. Durant, who edits the journal, claims that it will be unique in its focus on public understanding of science—"an emerging interdisciplinary research field." It will be aimed at a broad audience including journalists, educators, and policy-makers, as well as scientists. The first issue includes articles on antiscience (by Harvard physicist Gerald Holton, who is also a member of the journal's international editorial advisory board); popular science in the United States after World War II; and representations of scientific controversy in museum exhibits.

The U.S. subscription address is the American Institute of Physics Subscriber Services, 500 Sunnyside Blvd., Woodbury, New York 11797-2999. Subscriptions are $190 a year for institutions; $68 for individuals.

## Primatologists Band Together

New York City probably boasts the highest concentration of physical anthropologists in the United States. Though a good many of them work just a subway ride apart and are pursuing similar studies of the evolution of primates—including the nonhuman ones found outside the city—they have had few formal ties. Now, however, the National Science Foundation (NSF) has taken an unusual step to bring together 22 anthropologists at three universities, a museum, and a zoo in the Big Apple: It has awarded them $1.6 million to form a consortium to pool their research and for student education and training efforts.

The New York Consortium in Evolutionary Primatology will link anthropologists at the City University of New York Graduate School, Columbia University, New York University, the American Museum of Natural History, and the New York Zoological Society. Each of those institutions has particular areas of expertise, but each also has gaps in its graduate and research programs. Together, however, the programs are remarkably comprehensive. "It's a happy marriage—the collective fills the gaps," says Don Melnick, chairman of Columbia's anthropology department.

DON J. MELNICK

*Toque macaques in Sri Lanka.*

Students will be the first to benefit. Starting in fall 1992, NSF will fund at least two new Ph.D. students at each university in each of the first 3 years of the 5-year grant. That means at least 18 graduate students and five postdocs. The graduate students will be required to take courses and do research with scientists at each of the institutions, learning from experts in every facet of primatology, including paleontology, behavior, ecology, genetics, and conservation. Until now, says Melnick, "it seems we weren't taking advantage of being in a big city."