

of spreading the viruses, which have turned up in sites as remote as Japan and Wales, through Macintosh computer games.

## Eggs-aggeration

You may have read in the news a few weeks ago about a clever way to test eggs for salmonella contamination. Scientists at Los Alamos National Laboratory announced they could pick out contaminated eggs by measuring their acoustic resonance. That led *The Wall Street Journal*, *The San Francisco Chronicle*, and other newspapers to report that the method might help solve the growing problem of salmonella poisoning from raw or undercooked eggs. Sounds nice, but don't go on a raw-egg binge just yet.

The truth is, egg-contamination experts say, the method has little chance of success. "If this were a stock option, I wouldn't bet a dollar on it," says Charles Beard, director of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Southeast Poultry Research Laboratory in Athens, Georgia. Why not? Well, what the newspapers failed to report is that the eggs tested at Los Alamos were artificially infected and contained billions of bacteria—a whopping number compared to the numbers of bacteria found in studies of naturally contaminated eggs.

"We don't really know if this is an accurate simulation of what goes on in naturally contaminated eggs," admits team member Roger Johnston. And Beard says it isn't. In studies by researchers at the USDA and elsewhere, eggs laid by salmonella-infected hens contain as few as 10 bacteria, and at most thousands—not billions—per egg. And will the Los Alamos method—which only detects heavily contaminated eggs in 25% of cases—ever be sensitive enough to identify naturally contaminated eggs? There is no way to know yet, say the researchers. "They were cautious in their paper, and I tried to convey that," says lab spokesman John Gus-

## Orchid Gene Repository



*Cattleya Orchid—one of the species found around Brasilia.*

Brazil's Distrito Federal, where its capital, Brasilia, is situated, happens to be an unusually rich locale for orchids—botanists have catalogued more than 250 species within its 5000 square kilometers, compared to 350 species in the whole Amazon region. Now, according to Rio's *Jornal do Brasil*, four scientists at the University of Brasilia are trying to preserve as many species as possible by creating Brazil's first germ plasm bank for ornamentals, at the orchidary at the Brasilia Botanical Garden. The group has obtained 250 million cruzeiros (\$270,000) from the government and will begin by building greenhouses to cultivate specimens they have as well as additional ones they want to collect. Joseph Arditti, an orchidologist at the University of California, Irvine, welcomes this project: "Orchid gene banks present a lot of problems," he says—germ plasm has to be grown from time to time to be sure it's still viable. "Now there is only one outstanding seed bank for orchids in the world, in Australia. Starting one for living plants in Brazil, which is losing so much of its flora, is an important step."

tafson, who wrote the press release on the work. But, he adds, "it's kind of a cute story, so people ran with it."

## Dutch Polluters' Green Plan

One of the Netherlands' largest polluters is trying to make good by funding a long-term tree-planting campaign to offset carbon dioxide emissions. According to the Rotterdam newspaper *NRC Handelsblad*, the Dutch electric utilities, through the FACE Foundation that they sponsor, intend to plant 150,000 hectares around the world—enough forest to soak up the CO<sub>2</sub> that would be emitted by a single 600-megawatt power plant over its lifetime. The utilities collectively run plants with a combined capacity of 12,000

megawatts, but just to offset a 600-megawatt plant, their foundation will have to spend 20 million guilders (\$11.2 million) a year for 25 years.

Last month FACE began a demonstration effort, a 120-hectare wood at the edge of the city of Leeuwarden. But tropical lands are the main focus of the afforestation plans, beginning this year with a model forest of 40,000 hectares in Kalimantan, in the Indonesian part of Borneo. J. Van den Bos, the foundation's director, says it is also looking at possible locations in Africa, Ecuador, and Costa Rica, as well as the "black triangle"—where Polish, Czechoslovak, and German borders intersect—that Van den Bos describes as "totally ruined" by sulfur emissions.

Van den Bos plans to avoid the pitfalls of most afforestation projects, which he says usually

involve monocultures of non-indigenous trees that are vulnerable to predators and require energy-intensive pesticides. FACE promises to sponsor only forests with a natural mix of native species.

## Thwarting the FOIA

"Take time to rewrite [notes] in such a way as to minimize any adverse impact should they be publicly disclosed," the memo read. "Then destroy the old notes." Sound like the kind of advice you might expect to come out of, say, an Ollie North operation? No, this sentence comes from a two-page memo that appears to be an official NASA document. In it, an unnamed author went on to suggest a variety of techniques—including destroying and rewriting documents—that NASA employees might use to frustrate Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests.

In a letter to outgoing NASA administrator Richard Truly, Representative Howard Wolpe (D-MI), whose staff dug up the memo during oversight investigations into the SP-100, a proposed space nuclear reactor, charged that agency officials were deliberately sidestepping FOIA requirements. Wolpe also provided minutes from NASA meetings suggesting that the memo was the handiwork of Lawrence Ross, director of NASA's Lewis Research Center in Cleveland.

Within 24 hours of Wolpe's letter, Truly had repudiated the document as counter to NASA policy and had convened a panel to investigate the circumstances surrounding the memo. And Ross, along with a lawyer, had flown to Washington to meet with congressional investigators. But even NASA's prompt response, which Wolpe praised, hasn't mollified opponents of the SP-100: "Utterly disgraceful," says Steve Aftergood, a space reactor critic at the Federation of American Scientists, who sees the memo as revealing "amazing contempt" for the public.