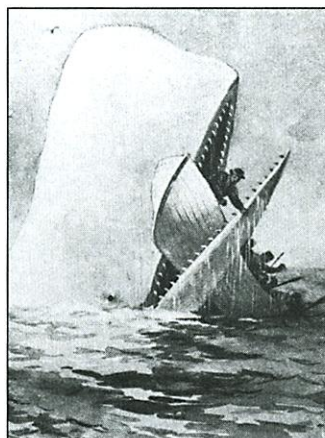


Set Melon on Ramming Speed

Whaling ships in the 19th century chased sperm whales for the reserves of oil in the spermaceti organ, the spongy bump in their foreheads used for echolocation. That bump, as Ahab and colleagues well knew, can also be used to destroy ships. Now scientists suggest that what caused these bumps to evolve into powerful battering rams was male-male competition.

All toothed whales and dolphins have sonar "melons," oil-filled sacs in their heads that serve as acoustic amplifiers and emitters. But in male sperm whales they are huge, occupying up to a third of their length and a quarter of their body mass. The world's small community of spermaceti researchers has speculated that the size might have evolved to help produce sound pulses to stun prey, control buoyancy, or just serve as a sexual turn-on.

Curious about the biomechanics of a real-life encounter that inspired *Moby Dick*—in which a 26-meter sperm whale sank the 238-ton whaling ship *Essex*—comparative physiologist David Carrier and colleagues at the University of Utah,



Moby Dick upends a whaler.

difference between the sexes and the more likely the males were to be polygynous. Because sperm whales are polygynous, all the evidence points to a key role of melons in males who protect their harems in head-to-head combat, they say.

Experts find the idea intriguing, but whether male sperm whales joust with each other is hard to verify through observation because they rarely stray into shallow water, says bio-sonar specialist Bertel Mohl of Aarhus University in Denmark: "We can only do so much in the field with binoculars, hydrophone arrays, acoustic tags, and midget budgets."

Salt Lake City, ran computer simulations to see how a whale's noggin would perform in a head-on collision. Although the massive organ is springy enough to protect a charging whale, it is still hard enough to deliver lethal blows, they report in the 15 June issue of the *Journal of Experimental Biology*.

What's more, they found from comparisons with 20 other cetacean species that the larger the melon, the larger the size

Rare Cat Snap

This rare photo of a Trans-Himalayan snow leopard—caught in the act of spraying while searching for a mate—was taken by a remote camera, a new research technique being deployed by a recent Royal Geographical Society expedition. Scientists are looking for ways to save the big cats, which are threatened from all sides: being killed by local herders to protect their flocks, and sought for their luxurious coats and ostensibly medicinal bones.



Getting Null Results Into Print

After long hours, weeks, and months of labor, the results come in: negative. Nada. Zip. A researcher's gut reaction? Move on to more promising lines of inquiry.

But a multi-institutional group of researchers led by cell biologist Bjorn Olsen of Harvard Medical School in Boston will soon be asking researchers to write up those unpromising results and publish them in the new *Journal of Negative Results in Biomedicine*.

Olsen says the online journal will cover the basic biomedical sciences as well as clinical trials. He hopes it will correct a picture he believes is distorted by a general bias against null results, which, he says, can suppress challenges to dogma and allow errors—such as mislabeled cell lines—to propagate.

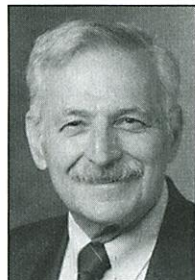
Having negative results widely available would save resources devoted to duplicating fruitless efforts, many scientists agree.

They're "valuable," says geneticist Scott Kern, founder of *NOGO*, a Johns Hopkins University-based Web journal dedicated to negative results in cancer genetics. Database searches often aren't very good at finding negative results, he says, "since [they] may stay buried in the methods section."

But Charles Friedman, director of the Biomedical Informatics Center at the University of Pittsburgh, doubts whether hordes of thwarted researchers will be eager to publish null results, which aren't noted for advancing careers. When the *Journal of the American Medical Informatics Association* solicited papers with negative results 2 years ago, they got only two publishable manuscripts, he says. One problem for the new journal, he adds, will be finding "work of such high quality that you are convinced that the problem isn't a failure of design, statistics, or methods."

Despite such obstacles, Olsen says the new journal will appear within 2 months at www.biomedcentral.com/info/newjournals.asp.

Two U.S. environmentalists have been named this year's recipients of **Yankees Win the Blue** the Japanese mega-environmental award, the Blue Planet Prize.



Mooney



Speth

Harold A. Mooney, 70, a professor of environmental biology at Stanford University, is cited for his work on plant ecology and for being "instrumental in establishing the field of global ecology." James Gustave Speth, 60, trained as a lawyer and currently dean of Yale's School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, is cited for "creating ... environmental institutions of extraordinary importance," including the Natural Resources Defense Council and, later, the World Resources Institute.

Each will receive 50 million yen (\$400,000) at a ceremony in Tokyo in November.