**A Planet’s Unseen Hand**

This image from the Hubble Space Telescope, released last week by NASA, shows the young nearby star Fomalhaut surrounded by a dusty ring created by comet and asteroid collisions. The star is far from the center, which suggests that gravity from an unseen planet is displacing the ring.

**Creationism Skirmish**

In the face of a libel suit, the head of an organization that tracks the ongoing battle over teaching Darwin in schools has agreed to publicly acknowledge errors in a recent article.

This spring, Eugenie Scott, director of the National Center for Science Education (NCSE) in Oakland, California, published an article in *California Wild*, the magazine of the California Academy of Sciences, mentioning that lawyer Larry Caldwell had proposed the names of two creationist books to his local school board and quoting a scientist accusing him of “gross misunderstanding” of science.

In April, Caldwell slapped Scott and the center with a libel suit. Although it does not mention the magazine, editor Keith Howell agreed to remove the online link to Scott’s article and to publish a letter from Caldwell as well as a mea culpa from Scott. The latter acknowledges that Caldwell did not introduce the two books, and that the comment about misunderstanding science referred to someone else.

“I think there’s a danger in lumping everyone in one category,” says Caldwell, complaining that NCSE has in the past wrongly labeled him a “creationist activist.” Caldwell says he believes in intelligent design.

Scott says she stopped calling Caldwell a creationist after he objected. She points to the suit as contributing to “an absolute explosion” of evolution-related “flare-ups” in state or local education systems. NCSE has counted 71 in 33 states so far this year, compared to a past annual average of between 50 and 60.

**Who Donates Organs?**

More than half the U.S. adult population has pledged to donate their organs after death—an increase of 26% since 1993, according to Gallup poll data presented last week to the Washington, D.C.—based Institute of Medicine’s committee on increasing rates of organ donation.

The poll found that readiness to donate one’s organs varies depending on age, ethnicity, education, and income, but that males and females are equally likely to donate. The survey of 1900 people revealed that more than two-thirds of adults between 35 and 44 years old are ready to donate, compared with 55% of those between 18 and 24, and only 38% of people over 65. Many people do not realize that the organs of older patients can still make for valuable transplants, said bio-ethicist Laura Siminoff of Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio.

Whereas about 62% of whites and Asians are willing to donate organs, the figure falls to 47% among Hispanics and 25% among blacks. “Among African Americans, there is a high level of distrust with not just organ donation but also the medical system,” said Siminoff. And this is the group waiting the most for organs. Committee member Clive O. Callender, a surgeon at Howard University in Washington, D.C., noted that African Americans make up 13% of the U.S. population but represent 35% of those on waiting lists for kidneys, the most commonly transplanted organ.

**Gene Knockout Leaves Mice Squeakless**

A new study suggests that the mouse version of a human “speech gene” also plays a key role in murine communication. It adds to evidence that the gene may be widely involved in animal communication.

In humans, mutations in the *FOXP2* gene cause impairments in both understanding and motor control of speech. The gene differs only slightly in mice, so researchers led by neuroscientist Joseph Buxbaum of the Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York City bred two types of *FOXP2* “knockout” mice: One group was homozygous—that is, it had two disrupted copies of the gene; the other group had one functional and one defective gene.

The homozygotes did not make the ultrasonic sounds that young mice emit when separated from their mothers, Buxbaum’s team found. Moreover, they had severe motor defects and died young. Even those with one normal copy of the gene had problems, making significantly fewer sounds than did normal mice when separated from their mothers, the scientists reported last week in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*. Examination of brain tissue revealed abnormalities in the cerebella of the double knockouts, especially in the Purkinje cells, which are involved in fine motor control.

Simon Fisher of the Wellcome Trust Center for Human Genetics at Oxford University in the U.K., who helped isolate the gene in humans, cautions that the knockouts may not offer a “direct parallel” with human speech problems from *FOXP2* disruption. But he says such studies “will be critical for gaining insights into the neuromuscular pathways regulated by this gene.”
Hubble’s new boss.
Astronomer Mattias “Matt” Mountain has been named director of the Space Telescope Science Institute (STScI) in Baltimore, Maryland. The job involves taking responsibility for what may be NASA’s highest-profile science missions: overseeing both the Hubble Space Telescope and its planned successor, the James Webb Space Telescope (JWST).

Mountain, 49, is currently director of the Gemini Observatory, which runs twin 8-meter telescopes in Hawaii and Chile.

The move is a natural for Mountain, who is the telescope scientist for the 6.5-meter JWST and co-chairs a review of the mission’s proposed science program in light of soaring budget estimates (Science, 13 May, p. 935). He must also deal with the merits and costs of extending Hubble’s life and bridging the gap between the two missions.

“Matt’s experience both with Gemini development and Gemini operations will be a great asset in helping us make that transition,” says outgoing STScI Director Steven Beckwith. “It’s going to be quite a challenge,” admits Mountain, who assumes his post on 1 September.

Flying high. South Korean geneticist Woo Suk Hwang earned iconic status in his country earlier this year when he became the first researcher to clone human embryonic stem cells bearing the genetic imprint of diseased patients (Science, 20 May, p. 1096). Now the nation’s flagship airline is rewarding him with a decade of free travel for himself and his wife.

“This will give me more chances to attend scientific conferences,” says the Seoul National University professor, who availed of the offer last month to attend a 2-day meeting on stem cell research at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, Texas. The couple may fly in the highest service class available when traveling in connection with Hwang’s research. “In the event that he needs to travel with research supplies, Korean Air will consider accommodating cargo transport needs,” according to a 3 June press release that announced the offer.

Canadian leave-taking. The chiefs of Canada’s two main science agencies are stepping down from their posts this summer—but on quite different terms.

Thomas Brzustowski (below), president of the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council, is departing voluntarily for academia after consecutive 5-year terms. The 68-year-old aeronautical engineer says his departure shouldn’t affect a strategic planning exercise that the agency hopes will result in a doubling of its budget: “This isn’t a one-man show.”

By contrast, Marc Renaud (above right), was denied a chance to serve a decade as president of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council and to resolve an imbroglio over the council’s strategic direction. Some Liberal Party sources attribute the decision to the government’s displeasure over Renaud’s criticism of its research funding policies. “I was frustrated, but now I’m thinking it was a blessing because it forces me to reposition myself before I’m 60,” says the 59-year-old sociologist, who had taken office in 1997. Replacements have yet to be named.

No small change. Portugal’s wealthiest man has left behind a generous endowment aimed at making the country a magnet for biomedical research.

The $585 million Champalimaud Foundation was created last month with a single donation from businessman Antonio Champalimaud, who died last year at the age of 86. His will names former Portuguese health minister Leonor Beleza as president of the foundation, which will support excellence in all fields of biomedicine. “We intend to link pure scientific research with clinical research,” Beleza says.

The foundation, based outside Lisbon, will have a small staff to run a grants program. It will also award a $1 million biennial prize for vision research as a tribute to Champalimaud, who lost his eyesight late in life. Members of the preliminary advisory group include immunologist Antonio Coutinho, neuroscientist Antonio Damasio, former Irish president Mary Robinson, and former European Parliament President Simon Veil.

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Climate science pioneer. Atmospheric chemist Charles Keeling, who was the first to confirm that the burning of fossil fuels was leading to an accumulation of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, died of a heart attack at his home in Montana on 20 June. He was 77.

An inventor departs. Electrical engineer and Nobelist Jack Kilby, who took the world into the computer age by inventing the integrated circuit, died on 20 June at the age of 81.
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