

news in brief

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Research ships firing airguns provoke Mexican stand-off

[SAN DIEGO] For the second time this year, US seismic studies in Mexico's waters have been cancelled because of concerns about harm to marine mammals.

Permission for the research ship *Roger Revelle* to use acoustic devices to examine geological rifts off Mexico's western coast was withdrawn on 15 April by the Secretariat of Environment and Natural Resources, an environmental agency of the Mexican government. The cruise, which began on 23 April, will be cut by about a quarter because of the inability to use airguns to fire bursts of compressed air in the sea. The bursts generate sound waves, which are picked up by the ship after reflecting off the sea floor and the rock beneath it.

In February, Mexican officials blocked a similar project using the *Maurice Ewing* off Mexico's eastern coast (see *Nature* **428**, 681; 2004). The 3,500-tonne *Roger Revelle*, which is operated by the Scripps Institution of Oceanography in La Jolla, California, and uses much smaller airguns than the *Maurice Ewing*, recently completed a cruise in the Gulf of California. No marine mammals were known to have been harmed then, says chief scientist Peter Lonsdale.

Only legendary physicists pass Google's fame test

[WASHINGTON] Heavyweight physicists may think they are public figures, but only giants such as Newton have achieved true fame, according to an analysis using the Google search engine.

Physicist James Bagrow and colleagues from Clarkson University in Potsdam, New York, compared the number of Google hits for a researcher's name and field with the number of papers that the scientist has published. The correlation was linear. Other groups of renowned figures, such as First World War fighter pilots, show an exponential link between fame and achievement, measured by the number of enemy planes downed.

Only a few physicists, such as Newton, show the same exponential relationship. But even he generates only a third as many hits as the pop star Janet Jackson.

→ <http://arxiv.org/abs/cond-mat/0404515>

Darwin returns to Italy's evolving curriculum

[ROME] Italian education minister Letizia Moratti has reversed her earlier decision to remove evolution from the school curriculum of children aged 11 to 14. She also promised that evolutionary theory will be reintroduced for schoolchildren of all ages.

Moratti said in March that biology lessons need not feature evolution, but added that creationism should be a part of voluntary religious-studies classes (see *Nature* **428**, 595; 2004). After being criticized for the move, Moratti set up a committee on 28 April, headed by the Nobel-prizewinning neurologist Rita Levi Montalcini, to advise about what to teach.

Sidelining Darwin was part of an overhaul of the school curriculum designed to make it less academic and more