

## Cloning paper pulled from publication after media circus

**London** Fertility researcher Panos Zavos has had a peer-reviewed paper on human cloning pulled — because he publicized his work before publication. The journal's editor says he also has concerns that what Zavos told the press doesn't match the claims in the paper.

Zavos announced at a London press conference last week that he had created cloned embryos by mixing genetic material from dead people with cow eggs. The insertion of human DNA into animal eggs, which are more easily available than human eggs, has been done before. But Zavos' use of dead human subjects has sparked fresh worries that some people might see cloning as a way to bring back the deceased. Zavos has made several controversial cloning claims but has yet to support them with published work.

Zavos submitted a paper on a similar topic to the *Journal of Assisted Reproduction and Genetics*, where it was accepted for publication. But editor-in-chief Norbert Gleicher, who would not disclose details of the paper, says he has concerns about the veracity of Zavos' public portrayal of the



**Panos Zavos claims to have made cloned embryos using DNA from dead humans and cow eggs.**

work. Gleicher says the journal gave the paper's authors two days to comment on these concerns, but received no response.

## Fault drillers try to get to the bottom of Chi-Chi quake

**Tokyo** Seismologists in Taiwan celebrated a promising achievement for earthquake studies this August after drilling into the fault zone responsible for the disastrous 1999 Chi-Chi earthquake.

**The Chi-Chi quake is particularly interesting to scientists as it caused a huge displacement of land — in some places, one**

side of the fault ended up 10 metres higher than the other. The samples taken from the drill hole should shed light on the physics of earthquakes, and help researchers work out how factors such as rock porosity and water content affect the movement of land. "This is a unique opportunity to validate the model proposed from seismic data with direct evidence," says Kuo-Fong Ma, a seismologist at the National Central University in Chungli, Taiwan, who is heading the project.

The researchers have so far struck four different fault lines at different depths down to 1,240 metres. They will continue to drill to 2,000 metres, as well as drilling a second bore hole, over the next year. Other researchers are drilling into other faults in search of similar data, including the San Andreas fault in California.

## Splatometer is a big hit in driving bug survey

**London** Car drivers are collaborating with wildlife researchers in an attempt to monitor changes in the number of insects in Britain — by counting the bugs that are splattered on their licence plates.

The Splatometer survey was thought up by researchers at the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB). "People had called us to say that they were finding fewer

## Slide rules line up to mark times past

**Washington** There was a time when no self-respecting scientist would be seen without the ultimate in computing technology: a slide rule.

An exhibition at Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana, is taking a nostalgic look at the history of these computing tools, which ruled from their invention in 1632 until the 1970s. "There was a point in time when the slide rule was king," says James Alleman, a civil engineer who has spent 15 years collecting slide rules from Purdue alumni.

Alleman, shown here (on the right) with retired civil engineering professor Robert Miles, proudly displays one of their prize specimens, which



measures more than two metres in length. The collection includes a rule once owned by astronaut Neil Armstrong.

"If these slide rules could talk ... I am sure they would tell remarkable stories," says Alleman.

dead insects on their windshields during the Sunday car wash," says Caroline Osborne of the RSPB. "We needed to quantify that drop because we were worried about the birds that feed on them, especially the house sparrow communities, which have fallen by 65% in 31 years," she says. Researchers speculate that pesticides and habitat loss may be causing insect numbers to decline.

During June, 40,000 volunteers counted 324,814 bugs, which hit plates at an average rate of one splat every 8 km. The society plans to repeat the survey in 2006 to check for changes.

## US centres set up to ponder broader issues of genetics

**Washington** The ethical, legal and social questions surrounding genetics and genomics are set to be tackled by four new centres in the United States, funded by \$20 million from the US National Human Genome Research Institute (NHGRI).

Elizabeth Thomson, director of the NHGRI's programme on these issues, says the plan marks a new direction for the institute, which has typically funded smaller, investigator-led research in these matters.

The centres will be established at Stanford University, California; Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio; Duke University in Durham, North Carolina; and the University of Washington in Seattle. Together, they will gather expertise from many disciplines, such as law, bioethics, science and theology.

## Singapore opens door to stem-cell research

**Tokyo** Singapore has become the latest country to ban the use of cloning for reproductive purposes, but to allow the work for the development of stem cells.

The law, passed on 2 September, prohibits several practices that might be used in human cloning, including placing cloned human embryos into the wombs of humans or animals, and allowing cloned embryos to develop for more than two weeks. But the restrictions do not prevent the development and harvesting of stem cells from cloned human embryos.

Only one company currently does research with embryonic stem cells in Singapore, according to health minister Balaji Sadasivan. But the country is working hard to build up its biotechnology industry, and observers speculate that the business will grow in the wake of this legislation.