

## NEWS AND COMMENTS

Keep those cards and letter coming! The value of this feature depends entirely on your willingness to take a moment to share with us an item of interest: for example, research projects planned or underway; newsworthy events, opportunities, or commentary; requests for information or assistance. Thanks in advance.

This "Shoe" cartoon seems to indicate that Mr. Jeff MacNelly is privy to current debates about folk biological classification.

## SHOE / Jeff MacNelly



Thanks to Ms. Claudia Konker, Department of Anthropology, University of Washington for the clipping. Reprinted by permission: Tribune Media Services, Inc.

## HAWK'S GENES IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING

Dr. William Sturtevant of the Smithsonian Institution sent in this piece on biotechnological brinkmanship, abstracted from a *Washington Post* article on 1 October 1984 under Christine Russell's byline.

The USDA is conducting research to produce extra-large SHEEP and pigs via genetic engineering using a human growth-hormone GENE. However, Dr. Harold HAWK, chief of the USDA animal reproduction lab, noting that, "some people would be disturbed about eating human genes," plans to switch from human gene implants to using cattle genes.

But microcannibalism is not the only spectre raised by this potential blurring of the folk taxonomy. The Humane Society of the United States joined with Jeremy Rifkin's Foundation on Economic Trends to file a suit in federal district court to stop the experiments on the grounds that the research represents a "new and insidious form of cruelty toward animals," to wit, "by robbing them of their unique genetic makeup." Michael W. FOX, Scientific Director of the Humane Society—ironically allied in this case with SHEEP against HAWK—asserts that such gene transfers violate "the moral and ethical canons of civilization."

Rifkin told Judy Mann (*Washington Post* 3 October) that "every species has a certain integrity to it. In the long run, you undermine the biological basis of that species . . . Where do you draw the line? . . . There are no species boundaries anymore. That's what the public hasn't grasped." Fox adds that, "We cannot improve upon nature until we learn to work with her." Their suit asks that the experiments be "declared unlawful as a federal common law nuisance and a violation of the National Environmental Policy Act, the Administrative Procedures Act, and other statutes."

Rifkin and Fox clearly stand on the nature side of the nature-culture dichotomy. However, Sturtevant notes, their distress may also reflect discomfort at this crossing of the boundary between a "higher animal" and a human being, with appeals to a cultural form that might be seen as farthest from that sacred boundary, American civilized values. Right on, Mary Douglas, Right on!

## RETROBREEDING THE WOOLLY MAMMOTH

In this regard, an item posted on my colleague Kate Mills' office door caught my eye. It had been clipped from the April 1984 issue of *Technology Review*, with the above headline. It was there reported that a Russian-American cooperative effort had succeeded in implanting a woolly mammoth ovum—retrieved from a Pleistocene ice remnant in Siberia and fertilized by sperm from a modern

elephant—in the uterus of a receptive Indian elephant. The resulting offspring were said to resemble both parents, but to have retained the infantile hair. The two surviving two-year old “Mammoth=elephas” individuals were last reported adapting well to the Siberian climate and in training as draft animals.

I found it astounding that this feat had not received wider coverage given its radical evolutionary implications. Dr. Mills had a good laugh at my expense, noting the publication date of April Fool's Day (byline: Diana bel-Aaron). Yet the possibility remains high on my fantasy wish list. Why not retrobreed a mammoth, a passenger pigeon, peking man?

#### CMRAE SUMMER INSTITUTE ON PREHISTORIC AGRICULTURE

The Center for Materials Research in Archaeology and Ethnology (CMRAE), Massachusetts Institute of Technology, announces its fourth annual Summer Institute course. This one month intensive investigation of ancient agricultural technology and its reconstruction from archaeological and paleoenvironmental data will be held 10 June – 5 July, 1985 at M.I.T. It will be taught by Frederick M. Wiseman, Principal Research Scientist, CMRAE, M.I.T. The purpose of the course is to introduce archaeologists, geographers, and scholars in related disciplines to techniques and methods used to reconstruct past agricultural technologies and crop mixes. For further information and application forms write Professor Suzanne DeAtley, Director of the summer institute, at M.I.T., Room 8-138, Cambridge, Mass. 02139, or call 617-253-1375.

#### MELVILLE AND ELIZABETH JACOBS RESEARCH FUND

The Melville and Elizabeth Jacobs Research Fund invites applications for small individual grants to support research on Native American cultures primarily of northwestern North America. The Fund is designed to facilitate field research rather than analysis of previously collected materials. Appropriate are field studies of any aspect of culture and society, with emphasis on expressive, conceptual, and purely linguistic systems. (Projects in archaeology, physical anthropology, urban anthropology, and applied anthropology or applied linguistics will not be funded). Awards range from \$200 to approximately \$800; salary cannot be supplied, and only minimum living expenses can be considered.

For further information and application forms, contact the Melville and Elizabeth Jacobs Research Fund, Whatcom Museum of History & Art, 121 Prospect St., Bellingham, Washington 98225. *Application deadline is February 15, 1985.*

#### SCHOOL OF AMERICAN RESEARCH SEMINAR ON AFRICA

The School of American Research, P.O. Box 2188, Santa Fe, NM 87501, plans to publish the proceedings of a conference held 22-26 October 1984 on “Early Complex Societies of Africa.” This conference focussed attention on the recently unearthed urban site of Jenne-Jeno in Mali, south of the Sahara desert. The city was founded ca 250 BC, flourished with an estimate peak population of 10,000 at 800 AD, and was abandoned by 1200 AD. Susan and Roderick McIntosh of Rice University, organizers of the conference, joined an international panel of historians and anthropologists to evaluate this earliest known sub-Saharan city.

#### ETHNOBOTANICAL STUDY OF AMAZONIAN ECUADOR PLANNED

The New York Botanical Garden joins the Missouri Botanical Garden in sponsoring a two-year study of the botany and utilization of plants of an area of Amazonian Ecuador. The project is being developed in collaboration with Ecuadorian academic institutions and the Ministry of Agriculture. It has the following objectives: (1) Collection and identification of plants within the study area; (2) Identification of the species by local people as food, fuel, medicine, fiber, etc.; (3) Collection of plant samples for nutritional and chemical analysis; (4) Identification of the most promising plant species for increased economic or subsistence utilization with collection of living material for cultivation and study by researchers; (5) Training of local students in field botany techniques. For more information contact Dr. Ghilleen T. Prance, Director, Institute of Economic Botany, The New York Botanical Garden, Bronx, New York 10458.

**8TH ANNUAL ETHNOBIOLOGY CONFERENCE**

The Botanical Museum of Harvard University, the Archaeology/Anthropology Program of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and the Biology Department of the University of Massachusetts/Boston are co-sponsoring the 8th Annual Ethnobiology Conference. It will be held in Cambridge and Boston on Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday, May 8, 9, and 10, 1985. An announcement giving registration information, a call for papers, symposia plans, and other details will be mailed to those on the Society mailing list. For further details and/or to request an announcement, write to:

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