



EBI to co-host 2004 ISMB-ECCB



EMBL postdocs travel to Africa ...page 3



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## EBI to co-host the world's largest bioinformatics conference

The EBI will be co-hosting ISMB-ECCB 2004 – a joint conference between Intelligent Systems for Molecular Biology (ISMB) and The European Conference on Computational Biology (ECCB) – in Glasgow, UK on 1-5 August 2004. The conference will be chaired by the EBI's director, Janet Thornton, and David Gilbert of the University of Glasgow. The UK-funded Collaborative Computational Project 11 and the Scottish Bioinformatics Forum are the other co-hosts.

## EMBL researchers travel to Africa to help build community health center

Earlier this year, two EMBL postdocs, Emmanuel Reynaud and Jez Simpson, hung up their lab coats and set off on an incredible adventure. Travelling in a 1974 Land Rover named Ella, they made their way from the UK, down through continental Europe and across into Africa, where they navigated their way through deserts and minefields. Their final destination? A small village in Mauritania called Khabou, where they helped the local community to build a health center. Read more about their adventures... [on page 5](#)

## He's got tape on the soles of his shoes!

You can find her every Tuesday and Thursday stacking labcoats in the cupboards beneath the second floor staircase. She has worked at EMBL since the very beginning, and used to have breakfast with Sir John every day. Find out who Martha Friedman is in *names to faces*... [on page 6](#)

## Predoc selection week at EMBL

March 10 marked the start of the annual predoc selection week at EMBL. Busloads of ambitious students arrived at the Heidelberg campus for an intense week of interviews, tours and socializing, all in hopes of being accepted into the International PhD Programme. Get the inside scoop from some current students... [on page 7](#)

## Does your Auntie Hilda know what DNA is?

Tell her to come find out at EMBL's Open House on Sunday, June 29. Visitors will get a real taste of lab life as they participate in guided tours, hands-on activities, and fun and games – all in celebration of the Heidelberg lab's 25th anniversary.

Hilda and others will soon be able to register, either online at [www.embl.de](http://www.embl.de), or by calling 06221/387 0.

*If you work at EMBL and want to get in on the fun, we've got lots of jobs for you. Just send us an email at [info@embl.de](mailto:info@embl.de)*

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## Education @ EMBL

Education activities are getting underway at EMBO and EMBL with the beginning of the EC-funded "Continuing Education for European Biology Teachers" project (CEEBT), which officially started on March 1. The Heidelberg campus will host an international Teachers Workshop on May 23-24, including teachers from across Europe, experts and media developers from many different countries, and scientists. Details can be obtained at [www.embo.org/projects/scisoc/education.html](http://www.embo.org/projects/scisoc/education.html) and from the CEEBT website, to be launched in the next few days. Scientists are more than welcome to attend.

The CEEBT project has also permitted the creation of a facility called the European Learning Laboratory for the Life Sciences (ELLS) at EMBL, which will be staffed by

scientist/educators and visitors. Their job will be to bring teachers in for three-day laboratory practicals which will be used simultaneously as a platform for training scientists and developing new educational materials based on EMBL science. Those materials will be made available to teachers throughout Europe via the Internet.

Trista Dawson, familiar to many EMBLites because of her former post at Cellzome, joined the project in March. She brings along years of experience in project management, communications and marketing. She also has a unique combination of academic qualifications, with degrees in both science and business. These skills will be especially valuable in managing the ELLS facility, strategic planning, financial management and promotion.

Alexander Picker joined the staff in April as Education Officer. He did his PhD at the Department of Neurobiology, University of Heidelberg in the group of Michael Brand working on the genetic control of brain development in the zebrafish embryo. After that he worked for three years at LIONbioscience AG, Heidelberg, where he developed web-based educational material for bioinformatics, did applied bioinformatics research and finally led a software development team. He wants to combine his interest in molecular biology, bioinformatics and teaching by developing new approaches to life science education in the context of the ELLS.

– Russ Hodge

## EMBL/EMBO to hold debate on digital age publishing practices

EMBL and EMBO will hold a joint roundtable debate on *Publishing practices at the Crossroads - Between the Print Media and the Internet*, on Saturday, June 7 at 14.00 at the Print Media Academy, Kurfürsten-Anlage 52 in Heidelberg. The aim of this event is to promote reflection and debate within the scientific community on how new technologies that are ushering in a new digital age affect publishing practices in science. The introduction of revolutionary communication technologies at the end of the 20th century has had a profound impact on the mode of production, appropriation, and dissemination

of scientific knowledge. In our view it is urgent that all interested parties, practicing scientists and publishers, collectively assess the state of affairs and future prospects as we find ourselves at historical crossroads between the print media and the Internet.

Speakers include Jean-Claude Guédon, (University of Montréal), Alan Fersht (Professor, Cambridge University), Dirk Haank (CEO, Elsevier Science), Iain Mattaj (Scientific Director, EMBL), and Michael Eisen (Director, Public Library of Science).

– Halldór Stefánsson

### more upcoming events...

On **Tuesday, April 29**, Professor Scott Gilbert (Swarthmore College, Pennsylvania) will speak about "Teaching evolution through development." This lecture is part of the EMBL/DAI-sponsored 'Science and Culture' series, and will take place at the Deutsch–Amerikanische Institut, Sofienstrasse 12, Heidelberg at 16.00.

On **Wednesday, April 30 at 16.00** Professor Gilbert will give a second lecture in EMBL's Operon auditorium, entitled "The new revolution in developmental biology: expansion and reconciliation."

On **Wednesday, May 7**, Ronald Plasterk from the Netherlands Institute for Developmental Biology in Utrecht and winner of the 2002 EMBO Award for Communication in the Life Sciences, will speak on "Communicating about science with the general public." The talk will take place in EMBL's Operon at 17.00.

*These events are open to the public.*

## New releases from Science & Society...

**Now available on DVD:** *Infectious Diseases: Challenges, Threats and Responsibilities*, a collection of keynote speeches from the joint EMBL/EMBO Science & Society Conference, held in Heidelberg on November 8-9, 2002. If you missed the meeting and would like a copy, email Lena Reunis at [reunis@embl.de](mailto:reunis@embl.de).

**EMBO Reports special science and society issue.** The May 2003 issue of EMBO Reports will be dedicated to a collection of essays authored by the participants of the *Infectious Diseases* conference. See [www.emboreports.org](http://www.emboreports.org) for more.

## Young researchers hold science symposium at EMBL

One hundred and fifty keen science students took part in the European Junior Science and Humanities Symposium at EMBL in mid-March. The event is organized by the European Union and US Department of Defense-dependent school systems to promote scientific research in high schools.

Organizers chose EMBL as the location for the symposium to give the students the chance to learn about EMBL's research. They also needed a real conference venue for their own oral and poster presentations. EMBL's

newly upgraded facilities in the Operon auditorium did just the trick.

EMBL staff enthusiastically served as judges of the posters and were impressed by the quality of the research. Research topics ranged from "Can you guess the flavour of baby food?" to "Does playing video games affect your memory?" to "Are North American or European students leaner?"

"I was impressed by the simple honesty in their approach to the scientific process," says one judge. "One poster included the

acknowledgement, 'Thanks to Greg's Dad,' and another had a Results section that explained the apparent bias toward male participants as 'We tried to get girls to play the video games. But they didn't want to.'"

Highlights of the symposium included a play based on the science of bubbles and a science trivia quiz, the lucky winners of which got to take home EMBL lab coats.

Thanks go to all judges, Anne Ephrussi, Andrew Moore and Luis Vacs for technical support.

# Out of the lab and into Africa

## EMBL researchers help to build a community health center in Mauritania

Earlier this year, EMBL postdocs Emmanuel Reynaud and Jez Simpson hung up their lab coats and set off on an incredible adventure. Travelling in a 1974 Land Rover named Ella, they made their way from the UK, down through Europe and across into Africa, where they navigated their way through deserts and minefields. Their final destination? A small village in Mauritania called Khabou, where they helped to build a health center for the local community.

MANY EMBL RESEARCHERS HAVE ACTIVITIES THAT TAKE THEM BEYOND THE BORDERS OF THE LAB. YOU'VE BEEN UP TO SOMETHING SPECIAL.

(Emmanuel) I have been doing humanitarian work for several years. While I was doing my PhD in France, I became friends with the assistant who washed our glassware. He was from Khabou, a small village in Mauritania. One day he asked me to help him prepare a report for his village association. We found a lot of common ground to talk about, and he invited me to attend one of his meetings. I was able to help them reorganize their association so that they could receive money from the government. We have been developing the project in Khabou together ever since.

HOW DID THE PROJECT START?

Some African villages have a self-imposed tax system where they put money into a pot and then decide how to use it. Many communities are very religious and have used the money to build mosques. However, four years ago, the people of Khabou voted to build a much-needed health center. It will eventually serve 35,000 people.

This is obviously a big challenge for a small village. Few locals have university degrees; most of them have never even been to school. They don't have the know-how or experience to develop such structures. This is where we can help. Through our networks, we have access to doctors, builders and engineers who can show them how to develop their skills.

The village's old health facilities consisted of a 10m<sup>2</sup> room with mud walls and no windows. The staff had to deliver babies, give injections, or perform minor surgery on the floor. Now they have a 110m<sup>2</sup> building, with many well-equipped rooms. Soon they will have surgery facilities, too. The nearest hospital is 45 km and two and a half hours away. If a patient needs urgent surgery, he or she usually dies on the way there. This is particularly a problem for childbirth. If a woman can't deliver naturally, she and the baby both die. The statistics are shocking. 1% of women and 2% of children die during childbirth. 15% of children die before the age

of 5, mainly of malaria. This area is along the Senegal river, and has a climate that breeds malaria-carrying mosquitoes. The river is a lifeline for the area, but it is also a killer.

A major problem with malaria is that parents fail to bring their children to the hospital in time. They'll visit the village medicine man, or try other rituals until it's too late. It's a problem of awareness, but there are solutions. I have worked with people on the other side of the river in Mali, where there is a different approach to healthcare. Medics work closely with the community, to teach them about prevention measures such as using insecticide-dipped nets. The staff there have been able to reduce the number of malaria-related deaths. But for this to happen, the community must take an active role. And it makes sense. We are also working to rebuild schools and give them books and supplies so that more children can attend. Once we have reached the kids, we can reach the families. This is a change that will take a long time, but it's a very important one to make.

HOW WAS THE TRIP FROM HEIDELBERG TO MAURITANIA?

(Jez) This is where I come in. Soon after Emmanuel arrived in our lab, we discovered our common interest in Africa. I've driven across the continent twice. When he told me he was planning a trip down there to do some work with his organization, I asked if I could go along. This was a chance for me to return to Africa and give something back.

In the meantime, Emmanuel convinced his friend Daniel, a doctor from Paris, to visit the health center to do some basic medical training. Daniel, however, refuses to fly. So for me the decision to drive down was easy. I have a Land Rover which is well suited for such expeditions. Her name is Ella. She is 29 years old and doesn't have many original parts left, but she's perfect for Africa. You can fix her anywhere.

The Land Rover lives in the UK, so I drove down to Paris to meet up with Emmanuel and Daniel. From there we drove through France and Spain, and across to Ceuta on the African coast by ferry. From there we drove

through Morocco to Casablanca, where we picked up our visas to enter Mauritania. After that we followed the coast for almost 3000 km until we reached the town of Dakhla, on the southern tip of Morocco. The drive through the Western Sahara is featureless. A few camels from time to time, but not much else. In Dakhla we made our final preparations before crossing over into Mauritania and the real desert stretch. At this point all roads finish.



photos: P.-L. Pentecote & J. Simpson

Crossing the Sahara in a Land Rover named Ella.

There is a checkpoint 25 km in from the Moroccan border. The problem is that the area is a former war zone and you have to cross a minefield to reach it. There is a piste to follow, but it's a difficult drive. As long as you stick to it, you won't get blown up. Under no circumstances do you deviate from it. That's a rule you never break.

Soon after the check point, you arrive in Nouadhibou. Though it is the second largest city in Mauritania, it is not connected to anywhere by road. You have to find a guide who will take you the 500 km across the Sahara. We found one and drove for the next two and a half days through the desert. It's just great driving! There were no roads, no pistes. We just followed landscapes and things you see in the desert. The final 200 kilometers is along the beach because the sand inland is too deep for driving. Before you set off on this stretch you have to wait for the low tide. This gives you about 10 meters of beach area on which to drive. Quickly. You have about three hours to do it, and you'd better not break down! After this, it's another two-day drive east to the village.

For more about Emmanuel and Jez's incredible journey, see the full story at [www.embl.de/ExternalInfo/oipa/n2003/n0403\\_1.html](http://www.embl.de/ExternalInfo/oipa/n2003/n0403_1.html).

Khabou's new community health center.



# A celebration of research at the European Bioinformatics Institute

As well as providing bioinformatics services to life scientists, the EBI has an active and growing research base. At the first EBI research day on February 26 we filled the auditorium of the Hinxton genome campus to celebrate research at the EBI, exchange information, get to know people in other groups, identify potential collaborations and, last but by no means least, enjoy ourselves.

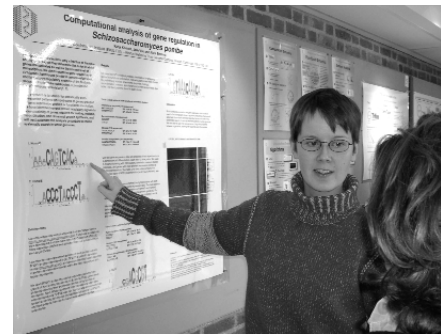
The morning began with overview talks from the three research group leaders. Janet Thornton's group aims to understand biology, disease and evolution through protein structure. Janet took us on a whistle-stop tour of the group's projects, from new ways of deriving functional information from structures to understanding the molecular basis of ageing and disease.

Nick Goldman's group aims to provide evolutionary biologists with tools to study evolution computationally. It's hard to study evolution because you can't do experiments: either they're illegal or they take millions of years. But evolution puts 'footprints' in sequences that allow us to determine not only the relationships between organisms but also information about the process of evolution.

Christos Ouzounis' group is working on functional analysis of whole genomes. The group has developed several resources for clustering sequences according to function, and is using these to find out how well conserved functions are throughout evolution.

As well as the three groups that dedicate all their efforts to research, the services groups carry out a considerable amount of research and development. Ewan Birney, Johan Rung and Rolf Apweiler discussed ongoing research in the Ensembl, Microarray Informatics and Sequence Database groups, including finding regulatory motifs in genome sequences, constructing and analysing genetic networks, and developing methods of automatic annotation.

After feasting on pizza, pasta and posters, we learned about individual projects in more detail, with talks on modelling codon evolution (Simon Whelan), properties of microbial genome organization (Benjamin Audit), using wavelet functions to analyse sequence (Pietro Lio), three-dimensional template matching (Jonathan Barker), using gene networks to learn about gene function (Thomas Schlitt), evolutionary conservation of pathways (Richard Coulson and Sophia Tsoka), studying inherited diseases from a



Katja Kivonen explains her prize-winning poster.

structural perspective (Robert Steward) and reconstructing gene networks from gene expression data (Lev Soinov).

To round off the day, our erstwhile director, Michael Ashburner, awarded the poster prize to Katja Kivonen for her poster on computational analysis of gene regulation in the yeast *Schizosaccharomyces pombe*. We retired to the conference centre lobby for drinks and more lively discussion. As the EBI's research base grows with the appointment of two new group leaders, the biggest challenge for next year's research day will be how to fit everything in.

– Cath Brooksbank

## EIROforum in Athens



photo: MB Hansen

The Directors-General of the EIROforum organizations met with European Commission Research Director-General Achilleas Mitsos during a coordinating meeting at the Demokritos Research Center in Athens on April 4, 2003. Greece currently holds the rotating presidency of the EU.

From left to right are: William Stirling (ESRF), Antonio Rodotà (ESA), Catherine Cesarsky (ESO), Fotis C. Kafatos (EMBL), Achilleas Mitsos (EU), Colin Carlile (ILL), Michael Watkins (representing EFDA), and Horst Wenninger (representing CERN).

## from the Staff Association

**2003 Elections:** Elected or re-elected to the Heidelberg Staff Association committee for two-year terms were Gareth Griffiths and Andy Hoenger (group leaders); Georg Ritter and Tom Cord (technicians); Doros Panayi (floating); Ann Cooper (pensioner); and Janin Topaloglu (ancillary). The postdoc position remains unfilled. Our thanks to Jorma Tapola and Kevin Leonard, who both stepped down this spring, for their valuable input over the last two years!

**2003 General Assembly:** The annual meeting of all Heidelberg Staff Association members was held on March 26. Reports were made on the activities, issues and finances of the past year. A video is available for those who could not attend. Contact the Staff Association in Heidelberg for viewing.

**Donations for Iraqi war refugees:** The Staff Association has opened an account for those who wish to make a donation to "SOS Kinderdorf," which builds homes and provides surrogate parents and a home environment for orphans. Iraqi children who have lost their parents will find a new home in one of several "Kinderdorf" villages in Jordan. Make bank transfers payable to Dr. Kevin Leonard and Godefrida Leenart (important: write both names on the bank form!), Dresdner Bank, BLZ 672 800 51, Kto.-Nr. 0475311201, with the notation "Spendenkonto für Kinder im Irak". Cash donations may be made to Frieda Glöckner in Room 116 at the main Lab.

– Ann Thüringer

## Come one, come all

to the 3rd annual joint EMBL/Staff Association Summer Party.

There'll be plenty of food, games, song and dance, and yes cowboys and cowgirls, the mechanical bull will be back.

Saturday, June 7, 2003, right after Lab Day

# the EMBO corner

## EMBO restart fellowships

The EMBO restart fellowships are a recent addition to EMBO's activities in support of European science. The fellowship supports scientists who have taken a break in their research careers for child care and want to return to the bench.

The initiative is a follow-up to EMBO's meeting "The glass ceiling for women in the life sciences" which was held in June 2001 at the EMBL in Heidelberg. At the meeting approximately 100 scientists had a lively discussion on the multiple and complex reasons for the failure of women to stay and advance in a scientific career. It was pointed out that one possible reason for the selective disappearance of women from science is the seeming incompatibility of a research career with

bringing up a family. The lack of successful women as role models emphasises this impression.

Following the meeting the EMBO Council published a position paper on women in the life sciences and gave the green light for a restart fellowship programme that saw its first deadline on 15 August 2002. It is the first international fellowship of this kind. Eligible candidates are researchers, female or male, who hold a PhD degree in the life sciences, who have taken a break of at least a year for child care and have published at least one first author paper in an international peer reviewed journal.

There is no age limit and international mobility is not a compulsory feature of the restart fellowship, as moving around can be difficult with a family. Candidates must identify a host lab and apply with a project proposal. The restart fellowships are intended to relieve returning scientists of the pressure to have to apply to highly competitive fellowship schemes for which they are in competition with others who have had no interruption of their careers. As one fellow says: "It levels the playing field. A restarter has no chance if she/he has to compete with applicants who had no career interruption and are fully mobile."

It will help the selected scientists to return to science and prepare them for a career, be it in academia, education, administration or publishing.

EMBO received 27 applications from scientists (all female) with very diverse backgrounds for its first deadline. The fellowship committee awarded six fellowships to scientists in Italy, the UK, Germany and Hungary. A profile of the selected scientists can be found on the restart web-site at [www.embo.org/projects/women/index.html](http://www.embo.org/projects/women/index.html).

Fellows say that the award provides a boost of confidence and they expect that adding an EMBO fellowship to their credentials will help them in the future. Recently Katja Arndt from the University of Freiburg, one of the first group of EMBO restart fellows, has been awarded an Emmy-Noether fellowship from the DFG.

The next deadline for applications is 15 August, 2003. Please direct possible candidates to our web-site at [www.embo.org](http://www.embo.org).

– Gerlind Wallon

## Making the grade: students gather at EMBL for predoc selection week

*Party posters plastered everywhere, people in suits wandering the halls, long lines for lunch in the canteen, and strangely, Group Leaders are in their offices – all clear signs that once again, pre-doc selection week at EMBL has begun.*

Every year, busloads of anxious students arrive at Meyerhofstrasse 1. They come from many different countries, speak several different languages, and have studied subjects ranging from zoology to physics. They all get off the bus with one goal in mind: to secure a coveted position in EMBL's International PhD Programme.

EMBL's PhD Programme has grown steadily since its inception over 20 years ago. Over the years the number of students accepted to the programme has more than doubled. EMBL can now award its own degree and has partnership agreements with 10 universities in 8 countries.

Students arriving for interviews have already made it through some tough competition. "This year we had 436 students apply,"

says Anne Ephrussi, Associate Dean of Graduate Studies. "That's more than ever, and the level of applicants was impressive. It was a real challenge to narrow that down to the 95 candidates we invited for interviews."

But being invited to EMBL is only the first hurdle. An invitation does not guarantee students a position. Not by far. Only about half of the candidates are accepted. To be successful, you have to be able to shine among the competing students throughout a grueling week.

Monday begins with a welcome presentation and tours around the lab, and ends with informal discussions with the Group Leaders over dinner in the canteen. Tuesday and Wednesday schedules are bursting with up to ten individual interviews each day. Thursday is also crammed with activities: individual lab tours and discussions with lab members in the morning; the feared "Final Panel" interview in the afternoon. Fortunately, this is followed by the Predoc Party in the evening, a welcome chance for the students to blow off some steam and have fun with EMBL staff and students. The moment of truth arrives on Friday afternoon. Students are mercifully given the

morning to rest and recover before receiving the letters which outline their fate.

What is the week like for students? "Monday night's dinner with the Group Leaders was quite stressful for me. But over the course of the week, the frequent interviews helped me to relax. I also sensed some competitiveness between the students at the beginning, but this melted away quickly and by the party, the group was very close," recounted predoc candidate Stephanie Boelz, one of the nearly 50 students to be accepted.

As for advice to future candidates, first year PhD student Barbara Di Ventura notes, "The programme organizers are quick to point out that once students are invited for an interview, they clearly have the academic qualifications. The students who try to cram in studying during the week, often get more stressed, and don't make it through. The point of the interviews is to test your communication abilities and to determine if you are motivated, and would work well in their teams." Stephanie agrees, "The emphasis on the week is about getting to know the pre-docs personally and not only about testing their scientific knowledge. So just relax and be yourself!"

– Trista Dawson

Stephanie Boelz successfully navigated her way through EMBL's International PhD Programme selection process and will join Matthias Hentze's lab this spring. (Photo by M. Schupp.)



## He's got tape on the soles of his shoes!



Martha Friedman and Sir John Kendrew

Twice a week, a small silver-haired lady pushes one of EMBL's omnipresent metal trolleys piled high with lab coats through the corridors of the second floor. She takes a very short coffee break in between two loads in a quiet corner of the Cafeteria, standing up, maybe exchanging only a few words with someone, because after all this is work time. On her way back to the cupboards underneath the stairs, she smiles at people passing by while she observes the life at EMBL, as she has been doing for the last 25 years.

### a letter to the editor

Dear editor,

Reading the extremely interesting article from the sister sciences in February's issue of *EMBL&cetera* concerning modifying the earth's orbit reminds me of a couple of modest, as yet unpublished, discoveries of my own in the field of theoretical physics which may be of interest. Both concern practical applications of the time-dilation effect of the general theory of relativity in the field of transport, which, as you will recall, was the original inspiration for Einstein's theory. The first of these, strangely, has links also to the life sciences.

Consider a railway train travelling across Germany. Typically the path followed is not a straight line and in consequence the carriages have to follow the curves of the track. However, carriages are rigid in construction and do not follow the curve exactly, only the points of the carriages directly over the pivot points of the bogies do this. Those parts of the carriages which are towards the ends tend to swing out over the outside of the curve, while those in the centres of the carriages tend to follow a path inside the centre of the curves. In consequence of this phenomenon the ends of carriages tend to travel much further through space than those parts in the centre. However, all parts of the carriage leave and arrive in stations at the same point in time which must, of course, mean that the ends of the carriages have travelled much faster in relation to a station-

Martha Friedman, our most senior staff member, scrutinizes each and every lab coat at the Heidelberg laboratory. As soon as a button goes missing or a slight rip makes its appearance, the coat is ruthlessly taken out of the lab coat stack and ends up under Martha's sewing machine at home. "I am at the lab five hours a week. I really enjoy getting out of the house and will continue doing this for as long as I can," Martha says with a smile. I was hesitant to ask her about her age, but before I could say anything else she added: "... and I am only 83 now!"

In the seventies, Martha was working for a cleaning company contracted by the DKFZ where EMBL's pioneers were temporarily based. Responsible for the EMBL lab area, she used to have her morning coffee with its occupants, including Director-General Sir John Kendrew. For years, rumours have been circulating about Sir John's unusual early morning routine when entering the lab. Martha finally confesses a well-kept secret: "Sir John used to wear shoes with black rubber soles, and with every footstep he left a mark on my freshly cleaned floors! One morning over coffee I hinted he might

want to change shoes, but instead he went straight into his office and got a roll of tape to cover up the rubber." As it turned out, he continued doing so every day after that until EMBL moved into its own buildings and to less rubber-sensitive floors.

Martha's daily presence was appreciated so much that EMBL offered her the job of being in charge of the first glassware cleaning group in the late seventies. She saw the laboratory grow and witnessed the coming and going of many scientists and members of support staff. For the last few years she has been in charge of the maintenance of the lab coats. "EMBL is my second home where everyone calls me 'unsere Martha'," she says.

Just as I am about to offer her another cup of coffee, Martha all of a sudden remembers she has a doctor's appointment. She slowly puts on her coat while looking out for Willi, one of EMBL's drivers who chauffeurs her safely up and down the hill. As she walks away she suddenly turns around and says proudly: "You know, every year on my birthday I received a birthday card from Sir John. He never forgot, not even once".

– Lena Reunis

ary observer than the centres. From this we can deduce that the time dilation effect of the general theory will have a much greater impact on those who sit at the ends of the carriages than it will on those who sit in the middle and, therefore, that those who always sit at the ends of railway carriages will live longer than those who don't.

The impact of the time dilation effect can also be seen to be responsible for the habitual late-running of railway trains in the United Kingdom where passengers are provided with timetables on platforms. These timetables are, naturally, stationary while responsibility for keeping the train to timetable rests with the driver for whom, he being inside the train - and at the end of a carriage to boot, time passes more slowly than for the stationary waiting passengers. Late running trains are therefore an inescapable fact of life in the UK! Consider, on the other hand, the practice of Deutsche Bahn who provide timetables to passengers inside the train. In these conditions passengers may well be disappointed at the late arrival of the train they are waiting to catch, but once on board are able to agree with the on-board clocks that they are indeed running to time and on arrival that the train has arrived punctually. Subsequent late arrivals at meetings tends thereafter to be blamed on city centre congestion rather than on late running trains.

– Keith Williamson, Personnel Section



### Makin' baby waffles

There's a lot more to being a baby than being rocked, changed, fed and cuddled. There's baking waffles, for example, an afternoon activity assisted by the teachers of the Kinderhaus' babygroup. Don't let go of that mixer, Sophie!

### ...from Intermedex

Did you know that dental implants are not covered by the EMBL Health Scheme? We encourage you to give us a cost estimate before you begin major dental treatment. We'll let you know what contribution you can expect. For more, please visit

[www.intermedex.de](http://www.intermedex.de).

## EBI/MSD releases new search interfaces

On April 2, 2003, EBI/MSD released new search interfaces to the Oracle data warehouse derived from the PDB. Searches include MSDlite, a simple text search system; MSDpro, a drag&drop interface that allows users to create their own query structure; and MSDsite, a PDB ligand environment interface. Each interface produces a result list of multiple PDB ID codes which

can then be viewed using a unique extension to the AstexViewer, developed by MSD, that integrates sequence, structure and properties into the one package. MSD will be visiting EMBL Heidelberg on May 15th to demonstrate the new services and several other centres across Europe during the course of this year.

– Janet Roser

## Researchers on board new FP6 funding instruments

Earlier this spring several EMBL researchers submitted proposals for Networks of Excellence and Integrated Projects under the EC's 6th Framework Programme.

Networks of Excellence aim to strengthen excellence on a research topic by bringing together the critical mass of resources and expertise. By tackling fragmentation, the EC hopes to provide a durable framework within which Europe's researchers can work together to establish themselves as world leaders. Integrated Projects aim to generate the knowledge to implement the priority of thematic areas. They will integrate the criti-

cal mass of activities and resources needed to achieve ambitious, clearly-defined scientific and technological objectives of a European dimension.

"EMBL, with its four-fold mission to conduct basic research, provide services and training, and develop instrumentation, is well positioned to participate in these new instruments," says grants office manager Genevieve Reinke. "With its expertise and tools, and experience in coordinating and participating in huge projects at an international level, EMBL can really be a driving force in shaping, structuring and strengthening the European Research Area."

## Fighting e-mail evils at EMBL Heidelberg

Unsolicited e-mail, or *spam mail*, has continued to flood EMBL staff's mailboxes, causing frustration and wasting time. E-mail can also contain viruses that infect computers, and this can compromise the Laboratory's network services.

The Computer and Networking Group has taken measures to protect the laboratory's users from these e-mail evils, while at the same time safeguarding timely delivery, and protecting user privacy. We have introduced the following three measures at the main lab in Heidelberg: *anti-virus checks* on all incoming mail; *blocking of incoming mail coming*

*from open relay sources*; and *central spam-tagging service*, to alert users to possible spam mail.

Out of about 20,000 e-mails processed in Heidelberg every day the new filters tag about 1000 as spam, intercept about 25 viruses, and reject 1500 e-mails received from open relays.

For more information, see [www.embl.de/LocalInfo/CG/cnn/CNN20030312.html](http://www.embl.de/LocalInfo/CG/cnn/CNN20030312.html) or contact system administrator Marc Hemberger at [hemberge@embl.de](mailto:hemberge@embl.de).

– Hans Doebbeling

## FAQs from the personnel section

### WHAT SHOULD I DO BEFORE GOING ON HOLIDAYS?

Each staff member receives a yellow leave card showing his or her entitlement for the current year. If not please contact us to obtain one. Record your holiday dates on the card with approval from your supervisor and send it to us before you go. We will update our records and return the card.

### WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I AM SICK?

Please inform your supervisor who should then notify us of your absence. If you are ill for more than 3 days, including weekends and public holidays, please obtain a certificate from your doctor. Send it to us and we will update our records.

Informing us of holiday and sick absences helps to ensure you have appropriate insurance cover. Sickness records may also indicate possible health and safety hazards in the Laboratory.

### WHAT IS HOME LEAVE?

EMBL reimburses the costs of travel by the most economical route for staff members to visit their home base. This home leave is available every second year from the start date of your initial contract. The period of absence must include at least five days annual leave.

Please send us a request before you go and a claim form after your return. It will help us to process the payment quickly.

For questions about this or any other topic, email Annabel at [goulding@embl.de](mailto:goulding@embl.de).

## March and April were busy months

as EMBL hosted visits from representatives of the member states. First it was the Swiss on March 7, then the Danes on March 11. Visitors toured the facilities and met with senior faculty to discuss new developments in the lab, and technology transfer. On April 2, 30 scientists from Ireland also toured the lab, getting a close-up look at current projects and meeting with individual scientists.

## Not quite Division A, but close...

Wednesday night "*calcetto*" has kicked off at EMBL Monterotondo! Organized by postdoc Pietro Pilo Boyl, a group of staff and students meet weekly at a local field to battle it out. A well-deserved Peroni and pizza follow the match.

## EMBL groups get out of the city.

On February 27, EMBL staff packed up their skis and headed to Meiringen-Hasliberg, Switzerland for the annual Cell Biology and Biophysics Programme ski weekend. In the same month, the entire Biocomputing department folded up their laptops for the weekend and went to Garmisch-Partenkirchen for a retreat.

## The Oxford English Dictionary,

Current Protocols in cell biology, cytometry, molecular biology and protein science, and *Der Brockhaus Naturwissenschaft und Technik* are now available online from EMBL's Szilard library.

## 50 students from the Comprensorio Vibio Mariano in Rome

visited the Monterotondo campus on April 5 to get a taste of lab life. They were given an introduction to the campus and participated in tutorials led by EMBL and CNR staff. Thanks go to Richard Butler of the CNR for organizing the visit.

## Safety tips from the Safety Office

**Did you know...** that one volume of liquid nitrogen gives about 700 volumes of gas?

... that breathing pure nitrogen will cause immediate loss of consciousness and almost immediate death? Neither nitrogen gas nor oxygen depletion are detectable by human senses.

... that liquid and cold gaseous nitrogen may cause severe burns and frostbite of skin and the respiratory tract?

### Therefore...

- ▼ Store and use liquid nitrogen only in well-ventilated areas.
- ▼ Wear a protective face shield and blue cryo gloves.
- ▼ Do not breathe the gas.

For tips on handling laboratory chemicals, visit [www.embl.de/LocalInfo/SafetyOffice](http://www.embl.de/LocalInfo/SafetyOffice), or contact the Safety Office ([safety@embl.de](mailto:safety@embl.de)).



**Andreas Ladurner** is a new interdisciplinary Group Leader in EMBL's Gene Expression and Structural & Computational Biology Programmes. Andreas obtained his PhD in 1998 from the University of Cambridge in the UK, and did his postdoctoral research at the Howard Hughes Medical Institute of the University of California at Berkeley. Having studied first how proteins fold and then how transcription works, his EMBL group will study how various proteins get recruited to chromatin and regulate the biology of the cell nucleus.



Director-General Fotis Kafatos is happy to report the results of two applied Developmental Biology projects in his extended family: the births of his first two grandchildren, George Walter Moschapidakis (*left*, born on December 26 to Helen and Stelios), and Sophia Louise Bunnell (*right*, born on March 6 to Zoë and Ben). "Sarah

and I are as happy as when our own two daughters were born," says Fotis, "and delighted with our new grandparent status."

**Faculty appointments:** As of May 1, **Mark Green** will become full time Head of Administration at the EBL, **Stefan Bäckman** will take over as Internal Auditor, and **Keith Williamson** will become Head of Finance. Keith will retain his responsibilities for technology transfer, and will also serve as the Administrative Director's deputy, in charge of purchasing and the grants office. **Heidi Noack** has joined EMBL as a consultant for the lab's Endowment Fund.

## awards, honours & cetera

**Janet Thornton**, the EBI's director, received the National Lecturer Award for excellence and leadership in the biophysical sciences at this year's Biophysical Society Annual Meeting. Janet gave her award-winning talk, entitled 'From protein structure to biological function and evolution', in San Antonio on 3 March. You can view a webcast of her lecture at [www.netbriefings.com/event/biophysics/Archives/awards/](http://www.netbriefings.com/event/biophysics/Archives/awards/).

**Ernst-Ludwig Florin**, a staff scientist in EMBL's Cell Biology and Biophysics Programme, is the 2003 co-recipient of the Nanoscience Prize. The 5,000 euro prize, split between Ernst-Ludwig and his collaborator Mathias Rief from the Technical University of Munich, is awarded by the German Ministry of Science and Technology's Nanotechnology Competence Center in recognition of the researchers' pioneering work in the field of mechanical single molecule experiments on biomolecules.

EMBL alumnus **Kai Simons** has been awarded the Matti Äyräpää prize by the Finnish Medical Society *Duodecim*. The prestigious award, announced on national television, was given in recognition of Kai's contributions to the molecular understanding of lipid rafts and membrane trafficking and how this relates to disease. Kai accepted the 17,000 euro prize at *Duodecim*'s annual meeting of the Finnish Medical Associations held in Helsinki on January 6, 2003.

Earlier this spring, PhD student **Rossana de Lorenzi**, went round to her colleagues at EMBL Monterotondo, asking for donations. By doing so, she raised nearly 450 euros to purchase school supplies for needy children in Guatemala. Bravissima, Rossana!

## Are you thirsty?

As of Thursday, May 1, the ISG's beer garden will be open Monday to Sunday from 16.00-23.00. Stop by the ISG Guest House, Eichwald 19, in Boxberg for a drink.

## Who's new?

Enrica Audero (Gross), Philippe Beaufile (Nebreda), Eric Blanc (Thornton), Stephanie Boelz (MMPU), Jennifer Clark (Harris), Trista Dawson (OIPA, ELLS), Jorge Duarte (Zhu), Andrea Giordano (Schultz), Kersten Guthrie (Green), Thorsten Henrich (Wittbrodt), Alan Horne (Zhu), Andreas Kahari (Birney), Samuel Kerrien (Zhu), Doris Lindner (Conti), Juliette Mathieu (Rørth), Jennifer McDowall (Apweiler), Thi Bach Nga Ly (ALMF), Alexander Picker (ELLS), Glenn Proctor (Birney), Mirana Ramialison (Wittbrodt), Heiko Runz (Pepperkok), Thomas Sandmann (Furlong), Markus Schwab (Nebreda), Damian Smedley (Birney), Stefan Terjung (ALMF), Henriette Uhlenhaut (Treier)

## events @EMBL

9 May 2003 at 9.00  
at the EMBL Monterotondo campus  
6th EMBL minisymposium on molecular medicine: Mechanisms of cardiovascular disease

14-15 May 2003  
at EMBL Heidelberg  
Minisymposium on the functional organization of the nucleus

7 June 2003 at 14.00  
at the Print Media Academy, Heidelberg  
EMBL/EMBO science & society minisymposium: Publishing practices at the crossroads

7-8 June 2003  
Lab Day at the main lab in Heidelberg, followed by the 3rd annual joint EMBL/Staff Association Summer Party

15-18 June 2003  
at the EMBL Monterotondo campus  
Colony Management Course

28-29 June 2003  
EMBL Heidelberg's 25th year anniversary celebrations and Open House

10 July, 2003  
at the Print Media Academy, Heidelberg  
EMBLEM Founders & Start-up Symposium

For more events, see  
[www.embl.de/ExternalInfo/todayAtEmbl/](http://www.embl.de/ExternalInfo/todayAtEmbl/)

An exhibit of Sarah Kafatou's paintings opens on May 17, 2003 at 18.00 at the Galerie Melnikow (111 Theaterstrasse, Heidelberg), and will last two weeks. Russ Hodge will perform at the opening. All are invited.