



## Meet Helke, the new Dean of Graduate Studies

Helke Hillebrand, who has taken over as Dean of the EMBL International PhD Programme, is busy meeting as many of the student body as possible this month, both at Heidelberg and at the outstations. But she and outgoing Dean Anne Ephrussi found time to talk about the directions in which they hope to see the EMBL International PhD Programme going. "For me this role is the ideal combination of a scientific environment, communication with people, and a sense of doing something for education in a European context," Helke says.

page 2

## EMBL's big in Japan

There's been a series of Japanese-themed events and exchanges lately. Monterotondo group leader Cornelius Gross (far right) has just returned from a month spent sharing his mouse expertise with scientists in Tokyo, which stemmed from an earlier visit of National Institute of Basic Biology (NIBB) scientists to the outstation. EMBL's collaboration agreement with the NIBB also led to the recent 'Evolution of Epigenetic Regulation' symposium at EMBL Heidelberg, and there was also a visit by a delegation from Osaka University in March.



page 2



## Would you really like to be 150 years old?

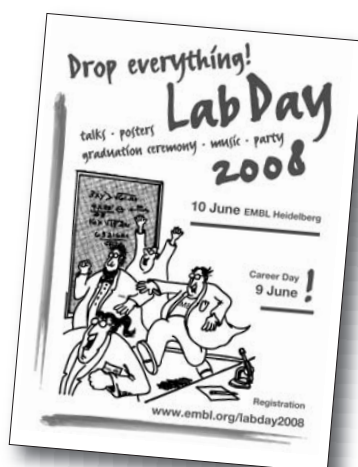
Biochemist Cynthia Kenyon, one of the pioneers in research into ageing, is convinced that the world will soon be populated by lucid, wrinkle-free centenarians. After her Heidelberg Forum Biosciences and Society lecture in February, organised by EMBL, DKFZ, ZMBH and the university's Medical Faculty, she found time for a chat about her brave new world, and about the research results that have persuaded her to change her lifestyle. "Our experiments show that *C. elegans* live shorter lives if they have a constantly high insulin level. I keep my insulin low by avoiding sugar, potatoes, pasta and rice."

page 4

## Make a date for Lab Day

If you're new to EMBL, or even if you're an old hand, Lab Day is a great opportunity to mingle with colleagues, hear about each others' work and have some fun. If it's not in your diaries already, 10 June is the big day this year. It's time to get your thinking caps on and make sure your group's poster is the cream of the crop! Oh, and don't forget to bring aspirin for the morning after...

page 3



## Australian links

Since Australia joined as EMBL's first associate member state, there's been a lot of meetings and visits from both sides, including a trip to Canberra to meet Research Minister Kim Carr (above left). We also talked to some EMBL alumni about their experiences living in the land down under.

pages 3 and 8

**3** | Feel better about yourself at friendly Journal Club

**4** | Opening windows to the outside world

**5** | An unexpected way to cause leukaemia

## There's a new Dean in town – and her door is open

It's always nice when things are going well in life, but for those times when they're not, PhD students now have round-the-clock support from EMBL's first full-time Dean, Helke Hillebrand. She'll be devoting all her time to EMBL's predocs and the high-quality graduate education of the EMBL International PhD Programme (EIPP).

"Anne's 'open door' policy is the tradition I'd like to step into," says Helke. "It's very important to have a personal relationship with people. I want all the students to know that they can come and see me at any time, no matter how big or small the problem."

With almost 200 students in the programme, the need for a person to run it full-time was apparent. "Though everything was working fine, we did have a list of things we still wanted to develop," says outgoing Dean Anne Ephrussi. "It became a very big job; with more students there are more chances of mismatches with group leaders, for example. Each one of these cases would turn up at my door, Matthias Hentze's or Lars Steinmetz's, and with our feeling that taking care of our students comes first, we simply felt that we didn't have sufficient time, in view of our other responsibilities, to develop and implement the new directions we believe are important for the EIPP."

Helke, who completed her PhD in plant molecular physiology in Bochum, is confident she can step up to the challenge. After a period as assistant professor, she went to lead a research group at the BASF Plant Science organisation at Gatersleben, gradually moving away from the bench: first with a position in Limburgerhof in science management, and then coordinating a group of almost 60 people working on enabling technologies. Finally, a career development initiative at BASF found her explaining the world of life sciences to bankers and investors. These varied experi-



Photo: Christine Panagiotidis

"I want all the students to know that they can come and see me at any time" – Helke Hillebrand

ences convinced her that a career move like EMBL's Dean position, with its focus on personal interaction, was the direction to take. "It's the ideal combination of a scientific environment, communication with people, and a sense of doing something for education in a European context," she says. "I've always loved working with students. At the beginning of my PhD thesis I was invited to be an interviewer for the Studienstiftung des Deutschen Volkes (*German National Merit Foundation, an elite scholarship-awarding body*), meeting undergraduate applicants. It was comparable to selection at EMBL, because they're looking for students who are really excellent at what they do and also willing to contribute in other ways. I'm also active in Jugend Forscht, a German youth science competition, so I've done a lot of work with young people thinking about going into life science. It's very rewarding."

Of course, supporting the students won't be

Helke's only role. While she was Dean, Anne was always aware that more could be done on the recruitment side. "We have very few applicants from Scandinavia, and it's difficult to attract British students, too," she says. "With Helke on board, the PhD programme can be much more active in attracting students at roadshows. She'll also be going to meetings on excellence in graduate education to further develop the high standards for the PhD degree in Europe. I think we can both strengthen the EIPP further and be vocal in establishing European standards."

Helke's looking forward to that. "Europe's best resource is its people. The most effective way of enforcing its role in world-class science would be to help institutes develop their training and education programmes and facilities, so that human resources become a driving force for Europe."

"The PhD programme needs to talk to the education ministries and set up more fellowships, along the lines of the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation one for postdocs," adds Anne.

Helke won't be facing the challenge alone. "I'm very lucky to have Milanka Stojkovic as a colleague. In administrating the programme for the past few years she has a wealth of experience and ideas," she says. She's also looking forward to consulting closely with the graduate committee and EMBL's faculty. Lars Steinmetz will support her as Associate Dean, and at the EBI, Nick Goldman, as Academic Training Coordinator, is the main person to go to with questions or problems there.

It's still early days for Helke, but she's busy meeting as many of the predocs and faculty as possible, both at Heidelberg and at the outstations. Her first week of navigating the corridors have equipped her with one piece of valuable advice for new students – "Get a map!"

---

## Sharing mouse know-how in the Land of the Rising Sun

Monterotondo group leader Cornelius Gross has just returned from a month spent sharing his expertise with scientists in Japan.

Supported by a visiting scientist fellowship from the Japanese government, Cornelius' sabbatical at the Department of Companion Animal Research at Azabu University in Tokyo stemmed from the visit to Monterotondo of Japanese mouse geneticists from four institutes, including the National Institute of Basic Biology (NIBB), in April 2006. Cornelius' host, Dr. Takefumi Kikusui, a specialist in social communication and olfactory perception in diverse animal species, applied to the Japanese government for the fellowship that allowed

Cornelius and Dr. Zhouxin Wang, a researcher in the field of sexual behaviour from the University of Florida, to make the trip.

Though he was busy in the lab and giving lots of seminars, Cornelius found time to draw some comparisons with life back home. "There's a lot of very creative science going on at Japanese universities; many are publishing in *Nature* or *Science* every year," he says. "Like in Europe, Japanese institutions are grappling with how to attract international students in the face of declining interest from Japanese students. The biggest problem remains their poor English, with few researchers able to communicate effectively. They could definitely learn a thing or two from EMBL's experience in this

regard, and EMBL could benefit from paying more attention to the high quality of research there. It is really too bad we don't have any Japanese group leaders to facilitate this."

The trip was the latest in a series of Far Eastern exchanges for EMBL, some of which have been part of the collaboration agreement with the NIBB, which was launched in 2005. On March 17-19, EMBL's Jürg Müller, NIBB's Naoto Ueno and Kunio Shiota of the University of Tokyo shared the organisation of the 'Evolution of Epigenetic Regulation' symposium at EMBL Heidelberg, and on 18 March, an Osaka University delegation visited to get some ideas from the PhD Programme.

## Chuck another prawn on the barbie – we've got visitors!



Since Australia joined EMBL as the first associate member state on 1 March, several visits have taken place to get to know each other better and develop plans for the future. Head of EMBL Monterotondo Nadia Rosenthal (left), Coordinator International Relations and Communications Silke Schumacher and EMBL DG Iain Mattaj (right) met Australian Research Minister Kim Carr (second from right) in Canberra in March; a delegation that included David De Kretser, the Victoria governor and a researcher himself, visited EMBL on 31

March; a meeting of the EMBL Australia Working Group took place on 1 April; and on 13 March Michael Gallagher, head of Australia's Group of Eight (Go8) major universities, also visited.

Two faculty positions have been advertised for Australians wishing to work at EMBL for five years and then Australia for another four. Opportunities are also available for pre- and postdocs from the Australian National Health and Medical Research Council, which is also funding one of the faculty positions.

## Feel better about yourself – read more!

Do you ever feel you should be reading more primary research papers, or perhaps keeping in touch with research areas other than your own? The Molecular Evolution Journal Club meets once a month and offers an informal setting for discussion and scientific chat.

"I chose the topic because it seems to find its way into many people's work, whether they realise it or not," says Aidan Budd, Computational Biologist in the Gibson team, who founded the group. "We take turns to present papers, whether historical or more recent, and it's really just a chance to chat about science with a wider range of people, perhaps also from outside your unit."

Aidan's keen to reassure potential members about that 'presenting' part. "Please don't be intimidated! It's mainly younger scientists who come along, and it's OK to ask stupid questions (which usually aren't stupid!) and show your total ignorance about a subject!" he says.

If you're like to join the mailing list to be informed about the next meeting, e-mail Aidan at [budd@embl.de](mailto:budd@embl.de). There's already a video-conferencing link to the EBI, thanks to the efforts of Vicky Schneider of the OTT, and the meetings can be extended to the other outstations if anyone is interested.

Lab Day  
10 June  
2008

## Mark your calendars for this year's Lab Day

Register at  
[www.embl.org/labday2008](http://www.embl.org/labday2008)

If you're new to EMBL, or even if you're an old hand, Lab Day at the main lab is a great opportunity to mingle with scientists from all sites, hear about each others' work and have some fun.

The programme includes talks from postdocs from all over the institute, and will also feature the first award ceremony of the prestigious John Kendrew Young Scientist Award for outstanding scientific contribution, which will be presented to the winning pre- and postdoc winners by John Tooze. In the afternoon the PhD graduation ceremony will be held, a very special and heartfelt presentation to celebrate the completion of the students' theses before they embark on their careers. A number of graduating students will give presentations to describe their own journeys towards a PhD.

The science will be interspersed with food, drink and entertainment from EMBL's music society, and the famous poster session, which mixes science and humour, will run all day. As usual there are prizes for the best. Of course, to finish the day there'll be a party until dawn.

Lab Day evolved from the 'Annual EMBL Lecture Meeting' in 1984. By 1989 this had become a day-long affair which was as much about getting together and having fun as forging new collaborations. As usual, the day is conveniently close to other events, such as the Heads of Units/Senior Scientists meeting on 11-12 June, and it's preceded by the annual Career Opportunities Day on 9 June, where scientists can learn about alternative possibilities other than an academic career. As almost everyone will be at the lab at this time, it's a

good occasion to grab a TAC member for a quick chat or catch up with old friends. "A lot of people take advantage of the day to arrange meetings about their existing collaborations, as well as forging new ones," says group leader Eileen Furlong, one of the organisers. "The talks and poster session provide a nice opportunity for non-scientific staff to get a flavour of the different types of research going on in the lab and to see how their services and support are being put to good use."

Eileen would welcome pre- and postdoc volunteers to help show new faces around the lab in the morning, so if you'd like to get involved with this or any other aspect of Lab Day, please e-mail [furlong@embl.de](mailto:furlong@embl.de), [Ramesh Pillai](mailto:pillai@embl.fr) at [pillai@embl.fr](mailto:pillai@embl.fr) or [Rolf Apweiler](mailto:apweiler@ebi.ac.uk) at [apweiler@ebi.ac.uk](mailto:apweiler@ebi.ac.uk).

Posters, music and conversation: snaps from recent Lab Days



Photos: Maj Britt Hansen

## Opening windows to the outside world

Now you need never miss a green or yellow seminar again as EMBL bounds into the 21st century, putting webcasts on the internet site for all to enjoy.

Specially selected Science and Society Forum and Distinguished Visitor lectures, which were previously only available on DVD by request, can now be viewed whenever you like. "We chose what we felt were the most accessible of the talks in the hope that we would be able to extend EMBL's valuable series of lectures to people outside," says Halldór Stefánsson, who, with lots of help from many EMBL individuals and departments, got the idea off the ground. "Of course, it's also very useful for those within EMBL who can't make it to the seminars, or people at the outstations."

There are also Training Lectures, provided by EICAT and covering subjects such as grant writing and how to get published, and some of these are for internal use only. They are available as Flash or Quicktime movies, both of which play-



Photo: Christine Panagiotidis

ers are also downloadable from the site.

"Traditionally we always recorded these seminars for our archives," says Halldór. "Putting them on the web is a great way of making the most of the fantastic speakers we invite here – and to fulfil our mission to contribute to science communication across Europe."

Each movie has been edited for your viewing

pleasure, cutting professionally from speaker to slide and back again. "It was a big job to process them into webcasts, which involved know-how and help from EICAT, the web team, Photolab, IT services and many others," says Halldór.

Visit [www.embl.org/aboutus/onlineseminars](http://www.embl.org/aboutus/onlineseminars) to see what's available so far.



'The Ages of Man and Death', Hans Baldung-Grien © Museo Nacional del Prado

## Forever young? – an interview with Cynthia Kenyon

rate of aging in higher organisms. People have already started to develop drugs that interact with proteins that affect ageing, but it's going to take a long time to know if you have a drug that slows ageing in people.

**How did you become interested in ageing research?**

Until the seventies people thought ageing just happened, and that there was nothing to know – it seemed to be passively dismissed in peoples' minds. But I noticed that most processes that seem to be vague and unwieldy turn out to be very tightly controlled by genes. In nature, you find animals with very different life spans: a squirrel can live 25 years, whereas a rat lives only three years. They are very similar in many ways, but different in their genes. So if those genes affect ageing, do they also control the rate of ageing? Another reason is that I was getting older, so I also had a personal interest!

**Would you really like to be 150 years old?**

If you love life and you're active then it would be great. Just imagine a person at ninety who not only looks forty but also *feels* forty.

**But the earth is overpopulated already.**

We already have to take care of that and bring down the birth rates. If everyone stays young longer, of course we'll have to bring them down a little more. It's more important for the whole earth to reduce the size of families and to extend the age of the person. The positive aspect of ageing is that if people live longer

they become wiser. They might have experience, a better sense of perspective and longer memories.

**Age is the biggest risk factor of getting diseases like Alzheimer's. What's the advantage of living to 150 if we get ill at seventy?**

It's true if you assume that you'll get old when you're ninety. But what if you're young at that age? The diseases are delayed. Among the proteins that extend life spans are some that behave as anti-oxidants and some as chaperones. We know many individual genes that kill bacteria, prevent damage from free radicals or whose chaperones prevent proteins from unfolding, so it's possible that some of the chaperones delay some protein aggregation diseases.

**How have you applied your research results to your personal lifestyle?**

We found that one set of genes that control aging also affect the hormone insulin which is known to be important in the metabolism of food. Our experiments showed that *C. elegans* live shorter lives if they have a constantly high insulin level. What causes the rise of insulin level in blood is sugar, so I changed my diet to keep my insulin low by avoiding carbohydrates like sugar, potatoes, pasta and rice. When I go shopping I always stay where the vegetables and the fruits are – I don't even enter the aisles.

**And how old are you?**

I'm 130 (laughs).

– Yvonne Kaul

Biochemist Cynthia Kenyon, one of the pioneers in research into ageing, is convinced that the world will soon be populated by lucid, wrinkle-free centenarians. After her Heidelberg Forum Biosciences and Society lecture in February, she had time for a chat about her brave new world.

**Back in 1993 you discovered that ageing is a genetically controlled process. When will the first anti-aging pill be launched?**

Our research with *C. elegans* showed that the ageing process is tightly controlled by the genes: manipulate a single one and the lifespan doubles. But it takes a long time to find out if these molecular mechanisms also control the

## Language tips from the experts

There's a lot to think about when you're new to EMBL, and for those who don't speak the language, settling in can be even more complicated.

No, not EMBLish – that will come sooner than you think! But if you want to brush up on one of your *official* EMBL languages – English, French or German – help is at hand. Within their first three years, language reimbursement of 75% off up to a maximum of €600 is available to staff members, ancillaries and fellows who are staying at least a year, but you must attend a certain number of classes to qualify.

Language training at EMBL Heidelberg is now organised by the Non-scientific Training and Development Programme, and the next placement test for German classes is in June. If you're keen to get started in the meantime, teachers Barbara Lederer-Janta and Wula Georgiadou have some tips.

"You have to be inquisitive, curious and, above all, confident," says Barbara, who's from Bavaria. "Being afraid can really restrict your development in a language."

"Don't learn words on their own," Wula advises. "If you're going to learn 'Wetter', for example, make sure you learn it in a context, like 'das Wetter ist schön'. In German a word is no good on its own." Barbara agrees. "Start with small sentences. After all, every sentence gets longer!"

Both teachers run classes at the university as well, but in the largely English-speaking world of EMBL, they see how easy it can be to find oneself years into a stay in Heidelberg and still unable to perform everyday errands in German. "It's important to go out and use your German in real situations, like shopping downtown," says Wula.

"Learn about the culture, too," advises Barbara. "It's intrinsically tied to the language; nothing can be directly translated from one to another."

All good advice, perhaps, but Wula and Barbara agree, there's nothing like learning from a teacher. "There's no magic trick to learn a language quickly, but signing up with us can certainly help!" says Barbara.

"But you *will* be expected to do your homework," warns Wula. She adds: "I love working with all these different nationalities and seeing people develop. Sometimes, if I'm teaching someone from outside Europe, it becomes a lesson about a whole new way of life for them." Her pupils get as much out of it as she does. "It makes a huge difference to learn a language with someone who genuinely seems to enjoy teaching," says Matt Betts from the Russell group.

Details about language classes at EMBL Heidelberg can be found at [www.embl.de/staffonly/personnel/forms.html#language](http://www.embl.de/staffonly/personnel/forms.html#language).

## An unexpected way to cause leukaemia

EMBL and EBI scientists have made steps towards understanding the development and treatment of a common cancer.

It was previously unknown which mutation caused acute myeloid leukaemia (AML) by allowing defective blood cells to accumulate and displace healthy ones, and how it worked. But by engineering it in mice, a scientist in Claus Nerlov's group at EMBL Monterotondo proved that a mutation in the protein C/EBP $\alpha$  causes the disease by triggering innate genetic programmes that allow white blood cells to proliferate uncontrollably. Their findings have been published in the 8 April issue of *Cancer Cell*.

"Ten percent of all patients suffering from AML have this mutation, but we could never be sure if it causes the disease. By precisely reproducing the human mutation in the mouse we now proved a causative relation," says Peggy Kirstetter, who carried out the research.

Together with researchers from the Bertone group at the EBI and the universities of Harvard, USA, and Lund, Sweden, Peggy found that rather than promoting uncontrolled



Peggy Kirstetter and Claus Nerlov

Photo: Mariëtte Schupp

proliferation of malignant blood stem cells, as was previously assumed, the mutation in C/EBP $\alpha$  acts on already partially differentiated cells, reprogramming them to self-renew and produce countless dysfunctional daughter cells. These displace the healthy blood cells, eventually leading to the inability to transport oxygen around in the body.

Scientists always thought that the mutation itself was the crucial step leading to leukaemia and should be targeted by drugs. Now that Claus, Peggy and their colleagues have identified that a genetic programme is activated in self-renewing leukaemic cells, it suggests that the cellular changes that lead to self-renewal are mutation-independent – meaning, therefore, that it may be more efficient to target the molecules and pathways shared between different cancer stem cells rather than the mutation.

## Young scientist winner has an inspiring time at EMBL



Photo: Christine Panagiotidis

Philipp Zagar, a winner of the EIROforum prize at the 19th EU Contest for Young Scientists, had an eye-opening time during his placement in the Gene Expression Unit in February. "The visit to EMBL changed my view on research," he says. "It showed me that it's possible to start with just an idea or a notion, and follow it up using all the excellent equipment and real know-how that's available here, so it's possible to implement things that you only *suspect* could work."

Philipp, who was 18 when he spent his week's placement in the Gene Expression Unit – namely the Schultz and Köhn labs –

from 18 February, won the visit for his project, 'Synthesis of a linker molecule for self-assembled monolayers', at the contest on 4-19 September 2007 in Valencia, Spain. Though his visit was enlightening, however, he's still unsure about which field to enter.

"I still don't know what to study, but I definitely want to do research" he says. "Maybe medicine, chemistry, electrical or mechanical engineering. If I study chemistry or medicine I'll apply to work at EMBL again!" After finishing a spell in the military last year, he's now gaining work experience in industry in Schärding, Austria.

Philipp would especially like to thank Maja Köhn, Carsten Schultz, Gregor Reither, Klaus Scheffzek, Amanda Cobos, Andrea Erlbruch and Adrian Neal for the support he received. "I really enjoyed my time at EMBL. I'll remember the nice people, the very modern, expensive equipment, the interesting topics that I had not been familiar with and the thrilling presentations. EMBL showed me that it's possible for me to do whatever I want to do – as long as I work hard!"

## Lynn moves on to pastures new

EMBL-EBI's Purchase and Accounts Officer, Lynn White, said her farewells to all at the EBI and EMBL at the end of March. Over the past nine years, Lynn has been invaluable to the smooth running of the institute's finance administration, coping with the demands placed on her by modernisation and the EBI's gradual expansion over the years.

In looking back over how things have evolved during her time at the EBI, Lynn says: "I've seen enormous change. The institute has grown from 70 to over 350 staff. Once upon a time I could look out of my window and see the rabbits running around on the grass, whereas more recently I glance up from my desk and see people gliding along the walkway past the window. It's really like one of those futuristic architectural drawings!"

As well as reminiscing, Lynn is looking forward to putting the skills she has developed at the EBI into practice elsewhere. "I enjoyed my time at the EBI. I've especially valued the freedom to be able to just get on with my job, and I've learnt many new things to take with me in the future." It's a future for which we all wish her well.

— Louisa Wright



Photo: Louisa Wright

## Cambridge delves into 'The world of DNA'

This year's Cambridge Science Festival saw more than 30 volunteers from the EBI and the Sanger Institute introducing visitors to 'The world of DNA'. More than 2,500 people dropped in on the 'Biology Zone', part of the Festival's 'Science on Saturday' activities on 15 March.

EBI and Sanger-organised activities helped participants find out which DNA sequence most closely matched their name and what species it was from, and investigated the functions of some exotic proteins, such as fish antifreeze and green fluorescent protein. Other creative activities included colourful DNA sequence bracelet making (below), DNA origami and edible double-helices that illustrated the concepts of com-

plementary base pairing and DNA structure.

This year's activities also involved exploring opinions on personal genome sequencing, stimulated in part by the EBI and Sanger's joint involvement in the 1000 Genomes project. Filming teams, with help from Jonathan Sanderson, a children's science television producer, interviewed more than 25 visitors about their thoughts on personal genomics, while the camera-shy could submit their responses online. The resulting 'Voxpops' will be made available on the [www.yourgenome.org](http://www.yourgenome.org) website, which also contains downloadable versions of the science festival activities for people to try for themselves.

— Louisa Wright



Photo: Wellcome Trust Sanger Institute

Karyn Megy helps young visitors make DNA bracelets

## Mastering the art of bioinformatics

EMBL-EBI held its annual Masters' Open Day on 3 March in Hinxton. More than 80 bioinformatics-related masters students from all over Europe came to learn more about the EBI and sample some of its services and research.

The day consisted of overview lectures, a brief summary of the EMBL International PhD Programme and presentations focusing on three different research areas. A lunchtime demonstration session involving 13 of the EBI's main bioinformatics resources allowed students to learn how these services can be used in their own areas of research.

The event received very positive feedback, with several students wanting to return to participate in the EBI's hands-on training courses. "The location of the EBI and the surrounding area is beautiful. I was impressed by how helpful everyone at EBI was, and very patiently willing to guide on the same points as many times as we asked," one participant said. In future, the event will be held in November to synchronise more closely with applications to the EMBL International PhD Programme.

Finally, a note to alumni. If you're involved in teaching bioinformatics masters students and would like them to come to an EBI open day, please email [training@ebi.ac.uk](mailto:training@ebi.ac.uk) asking to be added to the mailing list.

— Louisa Wright

## science&society

### Genome facts and fears

The second EMBL-EBI Science and Society Symposium, 'The Personal Genome: Hopes, Facts and Fears' will be held on May 23 at Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge, UK. This free afternoon event will consist of talks and an open panel discussion. The speakers are Martin Bobrow (Cambridge), 'What is a personal genome and what can it do for me?'; Paul Flicek (EBI), 'Open access to individual genomes'; Agnar Helgason (deCODE Genetics), 'deCODEme: The making and use of a personal genome service'; Adam Hedgecoe (Sussex), 'Personal genomics, expectations and promissory science'; and Graham Lewis (York), 'Personal genomics in a globalised world: improving healthcare or biocapital at work (again?)'. Visit [www.ebi.ac.uk/Information/events/personalgenome](http://www.ebi.ac.uk/Information/events/personalgenome) to register online.

## EMBO YIs meet Turkish young scientists

The first ever EMBO Young Scientists Forum took place in the lovely setting of Bogazici University, Istanbul on 20-22 February.

Two recipients of EMBO Installation Grants, Nesrin Ozoren from Bogazici University and Devrim Gozuacik from Sabanci University, also in Istanbul, organised the event, which aimed to highlight the attractiveness of a career in life science and to showcase research in Europe. It attracted more than 400 masters and PhD students, postdocs and group leaders from all the major institutes in Turkey, and was covered extensively by the Turkish media.

The idea of having a regular event to reach out to PhD students in the peripheral EMBC Member States came from members of the EMBO Young Investigator Programme, but the local organisers devel-

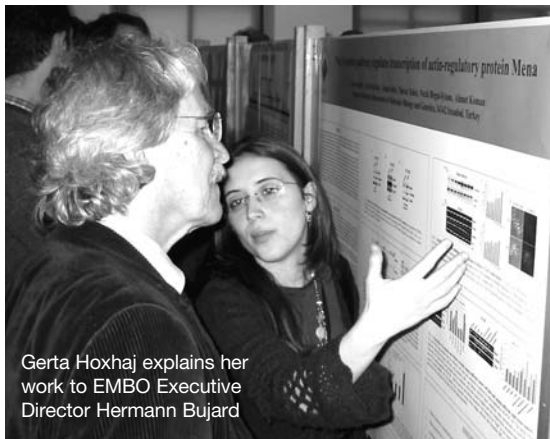
oped this idea further to include scientists from all levels. Fifteen Young Investigators and local Turkish group leaders gave talks, while students and other younger scientists presented posters and took the opportunity to network with the speakers in discussion sessions.

Bogazici University, formerly the American Robert College founded in 1863, is one of the top universities in Turkey, with 10,500 students and nearly 1,000 faculty. All major lectures in the life sciences are given in English, making Turkish scientists attractive on the international market.

The dynamic community of Turkish scientists who attended the forum are benefiting from the country's increased investment in science. The government plans to spend 2% of the GDP on R&D to become an attractive scientific partner, and will look at ways to lure postdocs and young scientists back to Turkey after their PhDs, many of which are completed in the US.

Both EMBO and EMBL are supporting the Turkish endeavour to strengthen their local science base; EMBL DG Iain Mattaj recently visited institutes in Istanbul and Izmir to talk about future plans, while the EMBO Young Investigators will return to Bogazici for their 2009 annual meeting.

– Gerlind Wallon



Gerta Hoxhaj explains her work to EMBO Executive Director Hermann Bujard



Silke Schumacher and Janez Potočnik

## Spreading the EMBL net

EMBL representatives at the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) – ‘the Olympics of science conferences,’ – were able to literally rub shoulders with European Commissioner for Science and Research Janez Potočnik at the event in Boston on 14-18 February.

The EMBL stand, which attracted many visitors from the thousands of attendees from 55 countries, was directly opposite the European Commission's booth, and the Commissioner strolled across to compliment EMBL on their attendance. “The EC is very keen that European organisations increase their visibility in the US, and there we were doing just that!” said Silke Schumacher.

EMBL has also attended several careers fairs recently in a continuing drive to make itself better known here in Europe, too. More than 50 visitors came with questions to the stand at ‘Careers in International Organisations and EU Institutions’ organised by the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 18 February in Berlin, and EMBL also attended International Career Day, organised by the Swiss Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the University of Lausanne, in Lausanne on 3 March.

## Bridging the two cultures

The Science and Society programme is inviting applications from PhD students of all backgrounds for its first European Science & Society Summer School (E4S) on 25-30 August.

Organised by PhD students and faculty from EMBL, the European School of Molecular Medicine and Harvard Kennedy School of Government, the theme will be ‘Deconstructing and Reconstructing Life: From Classification to Design’.

“About 20 students will be selected, and they don't have to be life scientists – we'd also like applications from the social sciences and humanities,” says Science and Society Programme Manager Halldór Stefánsson. The event will involve daily presentations and discussions. See [www.embl.org/e4s](http://www.embl.org/e4s) for details.

## Hobbies on show



Photo: Thomas Heinzmann

After enlisting some new recruits at the Clubs Fair on April 4, EMBL Heidelberg's Thalia Theatre Club treated an audience to a performance of the comedy ‘Oedi’ by Rich Orloff. From left: Creon (Mirco Castoldi); Town Crier (Nadia Dube); Tiresias (Christian Schuberth); Jocasta (Andreea Gruia) and King Oedipus (Ioannis Legouras). If you missed the day and would like to join something, you can find a full list of clubs and societies at [www.embl-heidelberg.de/~staff/clubs.htm](http://www.embl-heidelberg.de/~staff/clubs.htm).

Alumni facts...  
**65% of Australian alumni**  
**and 1.5% of all EMBL**  
**alumni work in Australia,**  
**32% in Melbourne and**  
**21% in Sydney**

## A warm welcome down under

You might be hearing 'g'day' and 'strewth' in the corridors a bit more often from now on, as Australia officially begins the first ever associate membership to EMBL's international community.

The country has become a central player in molecular biology in recent years, with special expertise in medical epidemiology and stem cell research. Associate membership will facilitate interaction between the Australian and European molecular biology communities and encourage the exchange of scientists, with EMBL already in the process of hiring group leaders who will serve their time between the two continents (see page 5).

Of course, many of EMBL's non-Australian alumni have already found themselves living down under and sharing their knowledge in senior positions. One such example is Thomas Preiss, previously a post-doc in Matthias Hentze's lab at EMBL Heidelberg, who's now head of the RNA Biology Laboratory at the Victor Chang Cardiac Research Institute (VCCRI) in Sydney and Conjoint Associate Professor at the University of New South Wales (UNSW). His lab investigates the mechanisms and transcriptome-wide patterns of eukaryotic mRNA translation and its regulation by RNA-binding proteins and non-coding RNA, and he still collaborates closely with Matthias Hentze at EMBL.

"Together with my wife Karen, an EMBL alumna, and two Kinderhaus alumni, I

moved to the other side of the world in 2002," he says. "I was very warmly received by the scientific community in Australia. I was awarded a Viertel Senior Medical Research fellowship lasting until 2007, and in 2008 I was admitted to the NHMRC Senior Research Fellow scheme."

As well as collaborating with his old EMBL lab, Thomas maintains links to Europe with collaborations with the Sanger Institute and the universities of Oxford, Warsaw and Berne, to name a few. But he's also giving back to his adopted environment by making use of what he's learnt from EMBL about training and research infrastructure development; he's in charge of the Graduate Student Program at VCCRI, and last year co-initiated the RNA Network Australasia, a special interest group for RNA scientists.

Of course, working in Australia sounds idyllic, with great weather and superb beaches on the doorstep, but Thomas faces the same challenges as any researcher. "Attracting talented scientists to the lab is always difficult, but Australia's associate membership with EMBL should now help with this," he says. "Also, it's tough finding enough time to travel to international meetings which, from here, are pretty far away. It's important to make an effort to keep in touch with former colleagues for the same reason."

Sabine Wimmer-Kleikamp, a recent post-doc at EMBL who is now at the Centre for Vascular Research, University of Sydney,

agrees. "I'm just starting a research group looking at cell-cell signalling events using high end imaging technologies, with a focus on vascular research, and I'd love to hear from talented students who want to undertake their project – or part of it – in Australia," she says.

She too maintains close contact with scientists in Europe, currently collaborating with former EMBL group leader Philippe Bastiaens, now at the Max Planck Institute for Physiology in Dortmund, and EMBL Heidelberg's Achilleas Frangakis. "Apart from setting up the lab, shipping reagents into Australia, and waiting for renovations to be done, I'm getting used to a few culture shocks. Seeing dolphins swimming past while I'm sitting on the beach, for example, and trying not to get sunburnt!" she says.

Thomas, who's had a bit longer to get used to life down under, still finds a few things surprising. "I can never get used to having Christmas in the middle of summer!" he says.

If you'd like to get in contact with Thomas or Sabine, please e-mail [alumni@embl.org](mailto:alumni@embl.org).

### Please mark your diaries:

- To stand or nominate someone for the 2008 online EMBL Alumni Association Board elections, contact [alumni@embl.org](mailto:alumni@embl.org) no later than 30 May. See [www.embl.org/aboutus/alumni/aboutus/board/index.html](http://www.embl.org/aboutus/alumni/aboutus/board/index.html).
- On Lab Day on 10 June, John Tooze will present the Alumni Association John Kendrew Young Scientist Awards to the 2007 winners Antonio Giraldez and Giovanni Frazzetto. The association will also launch its careers wiki website.
- Please note that the deadline for the 2008 John Kendrew Young Scientist Award is 12 September 2008. All former EMBL pre- and postdocs are invited to apply for the €1,000 cash prize. Nominations are also welcome. [www.embl.org/kendrew\\_award.html](http://www.embl.org/kendrew_award.html).
- As of April, Manuela Brunner will be your main point of contact at EMBL's Alumni Office, providing maternity cover for Mehrnoosh Rayner until September 2008. Also new in the office is Annamaria Kocsis, who will be working on the alumni database.



Thomas Preiss  
(third from right)  
and his group at  
VCCRI

## Alumni Board meeting

The Alumni Association Board held their bi-annual meeting at EMBL Heidelberg on 25 February. One of the major topics was the upcoming Board elections. On behalf of EMBL Matthias Hentze thanked those members stepping down, in particular treasurer Albert

Stegmüller. The Board welcomed Spanish alumnus Oscar Martin-Almendral as Albert's successor. Other items discussed included procedures in identifying more local chapter organisers; the design of the Matti Saraste memorial in the new ATC building; and fundraising plans to support the Association's services for EMBL staff and alumni.



## European neighbours need a helping hand too

EMBL's first ever budget officer is getting still involved in money management – but these days she's faced with a different challenge.

Dagmar Flecker, who introduced separate budgets for EMBL programmes during the 80s, now volunteers at a fundraising organisation, Confinis, in her native Vienna. This small charity identifies places in Europe where money or help is needed – and the land-locked country of Moldova is in dire straits.

"The mayor of a tiny village, Obreja Veche, had heard about Confinis when he came to Vienna," explains Dagmar. "We were already doing something for neighbouring Ukraine, and he picked us up from there by car. That 250km was a five-hour trip on awful roads!"

Dagmar was shocked at the conditions in the village. "It wasn't like Europe at all," she says. "The high street was a dirt track; the only means of transport was a horse and cart. The villagers had no running water, and the electricity was often off."

The village was clearly in need of a helping

hand. "The people are very motivated and welcoming, and they try to make it as nice as possible inside their homes," says Dagmar. "We hope to raise a little money right now to provide some small, tangible improvements at first – a playground, for example, and a football field – and then to train the villagers in farming and setting up businesses."

The improvements will employ local people for building and renovations, and they'll also learn how to organise such a project from start to finish. "We see it as confidence-building measure between Confinis and the villagers, to motivate them to train further," she says. "It's important to have good donations at the beginning to help them establish themselves. It could be a good example for the rest of the region."

If you'd like to help, money is of course the ideal donation, but old computers and manpower are also useful. "If anyone has other ideas or has time to help, please get in touch," says Dagmar. "Fundraising and writing applications can be done from anywhere!" Contact Dagmar at [dagmar.flecker@gmx.net](mailto:dagmar.flecker@gmx.net).

## newsinbrief

❑ **Free courses in the EMBL Non-Scientific Training and Development Programme** include Train the Trainer (14 May), Outlook Beginners (German, 29 May), Advanced Presentation Skills (5-6 June), Minute Taking (25 June) and Time Management (26 June). E-mail [td@embl.de](mailto:td@embl.de) or go to [www.embl.org/staffonly/personnel/training\\_dev/index.html](http://www.embl.org/staffonly/personnel/training_dev/index.html) for more details.

❑ **The Protein Expression & Purification Core Facility** in Heidelberg would like to inform users that they are once again able to offer a full service in insect cell expression with the *Baculovirus* system. If you want support in your protein expression project, please contact [pepcore@embl.de](mailto:pepcore@embl.de), visit the facility in room 342 or see the updated website at [www.pepcore.embl.de](http://www.pepcore.embl.de).

❑ **Registration is now open** for the EBI's hands-on bioinformatics training courses on Patterns, Similarities and Differences in Biological Data (9-11 June), Programmatic Access to Proteomics Resources (28-31 July), Interactions and Pathways (26-27 August) and the first ENFIN advanced course on methods for protein function prediction (1-3 September). Visit [www.ebi.ac.uk/training/handson](http://www.ebi.ac.uk/training/handson) for more information and to register.

❑ **A party of Israeli students** from the faculty of agricultural, food and environmental quality sciences at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, the partner of Heidelberg univer-



sity, had a visit to EMBL on 28 March as part of a five-day stay in the region. "They liked the lectures and the atmosphere at EMBL and loved the location, and asked so many questions that we had to skip the lab tour," says OIPAs Yvonne Kaul, who hosted them. Keren Guy from the Arendt group acted as interpreter, and the students whipped out their flag for a photo opportunity outside the main entrance (above).

❑ **Ten biology and medicine students** from Europe and the US who were in the region to attend the European Spring Event on Neuroethics in Ludwigshafen paid a visit to EMBL on 10 March, during which they learnt about the work of Detlev Arendt's lab from him and Heidi Snyman.

❑ **EMBL DG Iain Mattaj visited Prague** on 28 March to meet Ing. Pavel Komárek, the Deputy Minister of Education, Youth and Sports, and Jan Marek, Director of the Department of International Cooperation in Science and Technology, to talk about the

## from the Staff Association

❑ The Heidelberg Staff Association held its annual **General Assembly and Clubs Fair** on 4 April. Chairman Doros Panayi informed staff about this year's main developments from the Council Working Group's review of the Rules and Regulations and Pension Scheme. Changes and clarifications are being considered for the unemployment insurance, installation and reinstallation grant, removal costs, overtime and the education grant, as well as the pension scheme. If you were unable to attend, please contact one of the Staff Association representatives for more information. The Staff Association would also like to thank all the representatives who made the afternoon's Clubs Fair (page 7) a success.

❑ Make a note in your diaries of these 2008 Events: **EMBL Summer Party** (21 June); **Oktoberfest** (11 October). If you'd like to plan a themed party for staff in Heidelberg, please contact Catherine Floyd at the Staff Association office.

❑ Keep up-to-date with the Staff Association websites: [www.embl-heidelberg.de/~staff/](http://www.embl-heidelberg.de/~staff/) (and for retirees, [www.embl-heidelberg.de/~staff/pensioners/](http://www.embl-heidelberg.de/~staff/pensioners/)). – Catherine Floyd

benefits of becoming an EMBL member state.

❑ **Heidelberg's Gemeinderat** (town council), including the mayor, Eckart Würzner, visited EMBL on 27 March to see how the ATC is coming along. They enjoyed presentations by EMBL DG Iain Mattaj, EICAT manager Matthias Haury and Gene Expression head Jan Ellenberg.

## It's business as usual in the Personnel section

Annabel Goulding, acting head of Personnel since Yann Chabod's departure in March, would like to assure everyone that it's 'business as usual' in the department. "Yann had some clear visions and we'll be continuing to implement his ideas, like assigning particular staff to look after units," she says. With Christine Kastinger at the EBI for six months, your main contacts at the moment are Elke Jagomast and Laura Minnich for recruitment, Jasmin Greuenbühler and Daniela Scheerer for payroll and Elke for contracts. Room 107, headed by Steffen Müller, will be an 'open office' from 9-5 every day, so drop in with your general queries about employment at EMBL. A new head of personnel is expected to be hired in the autumn.

## people@EMBL



**Francesca Peri** became EMBL Heidelberg's newest group leader on 1 April. She comes from Venice and completed her PhD at Cologne University in 2002 before moving to Tübingen to do a postdoc. She may be familiar to some, as for the past year and a half she has been a visitor to Darren Gilmour's group. Her group in the Developmental Biology Unit will use zebrafish as a model system, and are generating methods for real-time identification of apoptotic neurons to look at microglial-mediated neuronal degeneration, a hallmark of many neuronal diseases like Alzheimer's and Parkinson's.

European Affairs Officer **Vera Herkommer** will be joining forces with Silke Schumacher to deal with EMBL's international relations, particularly the ESFRI projects. Originally from Bonn, Vera trained as a lawyer and later worked as scientific legal assistant at Würzburg University and as legal officer at the German Research Foundation, where she was responsible for developing funding projects for young scientists. When she's not enjoying EMBL's international atmosphere, Vera likes to play the violin and travel to France. She's also spending a lot of time searching for the perfect flat in Heidelberg – but it must have a wooden floor.



**Julie Mace** has joined the EBI as Accounts/Purchase Administrator, taking over from Lynn White (see page 6). Julie studied zoology at Manchester University but quickly moved into computer programming before specialising in finance. She spent ten years programming the IBM AS400, latterly with Acorn Computers. She has also held a number of finance roles, most recently as Bursar for a primary school, which involved handling all aspects of finance. Her hobbies include cross stitch and ballroom dancing and she lives in the Suffolk market town of Haverhill with her husband and two children.

EMBL Hamburg's new Training Officer, **Rosemary Wilson**, grew up in Mid Wales. She studied Natural Sciences in Birmingham, majoring in Biology and Geology, and as part of her degree spent a year in Göttingen, Germany. She liked it so much that when she'd finished her degree she went back to do her PhD in Systematic Botany, which she completed in 2006. Since then she has worked as Associate Editor for TAXON, a journal focussing on plant systematics and evolution. She enjoys sports including yoga, climbing and sailing, and is looking forward to getting to know Hamburg and the north of Germany.



## awards&honours

Gene Expression group leader **Andreas Ladurner** is the recipient of a Young Investigator Award from the International Association for Protein Structure (IAPSAP) for identification of the 'Ago hook', a small, conserved peptide motif that binds Argonaute proteins from yeast to humans. The award, a cash prize and plaque, is awarded every two years and will be presented at the Methods in Protein Structure Analysis 2008 meeting in Sapporo, Japan on 26-29 August, where Andreas will also present the work. However, he is keen that credit goes where it's due. "The award letter specifically cites the work of my PhD student Susanne Till, which was done in collaboration with Matthias Hentze's lab," he says. "She used the range of biophysical and cell-biological approaches available to her at EMBL to identify and then study the Ago hook in collaboration with Rolf Thermann, who found out that its peptides affect microRNA function. I think it's great if we get prizes based on our students' work, because it proves the quality of EMBL's PhD programme, and as her group leader I'm very proud that the Young Investigator Committee gave a special mention to her research."

## events@EMBL

6-7 May EMBL-EBI Hinxton

**Hands-On Course: Protein Structural Annotation**

9 May EMBL Heidelberg

**EMBL Distinguished Visitor Lecture: Cell Cycle Control.** Paul Nurse, President of the Rockefeller University, New York

9-10 May EMBL Heidelberg  
**SAC Meeting**

11-16 May EMBL-EBI Hinxton

**Course: 8th BioSapiens European School of Bioinformatics**

23 May EMBL-EBI Hinxton

**EMBL-EBI Science and Society Conference: The Personal Genome: Hopes, Facts and Fears**

2-7 June EMBL Grenoble

**EMBO practical course: structural characterisation of macromolecular complexes.**

9-11 June EMBL-EBI Hinxton

**Course: Patterns, Similarities and Differences in Biological Data**

9 June EMBL Heidelberg  
**Career Day**

10 June EMBL Heidelberg  
**Lab Day**

11-12 June EMBL Heidelberg

**Heads of Units/Senior Scientists Meeting**

13-18 June EMBL Heidelberg

**EMBO Practical Course: High-throughput RNAi**

21 June EMBL Heidelberg

**Staff Association Summer Party**

For more details about these events and more, visit [www.embl.org/events](http://www.embl.org/events).



On 9 April violinist Arabella Steinbacher, accompanied by Robert Kulek on the piano, performed modern classic pieces by Poulenc, Fauré, Ravel and Prokofiev in the Operon to the delight of EMBL staff and the public. A big thank you from organiser Klaus Scheffzek to building maintenance, the sponsors and everyone else who made the event possible.