



ScienceWriters™

National Association
of Science Writers, Inc.

Fall
2011

THE FREE LANCE:
WRITERS BECOMING
DIGITAL
ENTREPRENEURS

RETRACTIONS OF
SCIENTIFIC STUDIES
SURGE

SUBMISSION
DETAILS INSIDE!

SCIENCE
IN SOCIETY JOURNALISM
AWARDS FOR 2012

SIGHTS, SCENES
AND REPORTS
FROM DOHA, QATAR
WCSJ2011

TUCSON BOOK
FESTIVAL
A JUGGERNAUT

CYBERBEAT:
FREEDOM
OF INFORMATION
SPARKS CYBER TALK

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On The Cover

Images from WCSJ2011 in Doha, Qatar.
Decorative bejeweled metalwork and
English/Arabic keyboard by Lynne
Friedmann.

FROM THE EDITOR

ScienceWriters devotes the first 11 pages of this issue to reflections, workshop summaries, images, a medical mishap, and a political controversy that were all a part of the World Conference of Science Journalists in Doha, Qatar.

This issue welcomes Ben Carollo as co-author of the Scholarly Pursuits column. His collaboration with Rick Borchelt is off to a great start tackling the thorny issue of science and risk communication.

As The Free Lance guest columnist, Genevive Bjorn provides a meaty write-up of an Independent Journalist workshop under the auspices of the Knight Digital Medical Center at UC Berkeley. Based on the experience she now refers to herself as a digital entrepreneur.



Lynne Friedmann

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Science Journalism Under Review During WCSJ2011

Making History in Doha

BY ROGER BIRD

Like most journalists, those covering science seldom have the time out to step back and reflect on their profession. The World Conference of Science Journalists (WCSJ) makes this reflection possible every two years, and this year it took place June 27 to 29 in Doha, the capital of Qatar on the Persian Gulf.

Conference co-hosts were the National Association of Science Writers and the Arab Association of Science Journalists (AASJ).

A pre-conference statement by AASJ president Nehal Lasheen noted: "It will be held on Arab soil...during a time when the region is experiencing an inspiring trend of revolutions against corruption."

The conference was originally set for Cairo, but the Egyptian people "surprised us with their glorious January 25 Revolution, which was cheered by the world and praised for its purity and peacefulness," Lasheen said. "However, the revolution also curbed our ability to host the conference in Cairo."

When the decision was made to move the conference from Cairo, many people in many countries had to redouble their efforts.

Nadia El-Awady and Dalia Abdel Salam, working from Cairo, and Sarah Willan and Jean-Marc Fleury, dispatched respectively from the United Kingdom and Canada to finalize arrangements in Doha, wrote in the days before the conference opened, underlining their achievement: "Each conference faces many challenges, but this one had to cope with exceptional ones," their message said.

"It is the first time that the [WCSJ] has to be moved to a different country a few months before it is due to happen...imagine that you are in charge of a \$1.2 million project that you have been working on for two years, which suddenly moves to another country. How can you continue to manage and be responsible for the project?"

"It has been tough, many adjustments had to be made, but the response was to work harder and expand the team with some members working in the new location," they said.

Organizers found a very generous partner in the Qatar Foundation which covered more than the costs of moving the conference to Doha and held to its promise of supporting the conference program exactly as it was designed for Cairo.

NASW president Nancy Shute said when the U.S. and Arab associations joined forces in 2007, "Our aim was to learn from each

other about reporting science in different cultures, about new attitudes toward science, and about the rapidly changing impact of science and technology upon human life and our planet. Both groups hoped to show that we were capable of working together to transcend politics."

Conference program director Deborah Blum said since "this is the first world conference to be held in an Arab country and in a developing region of the world, we wanted this program to represent those perspectives and to be inclusive of journalists—and journalistic storytelling—from a range of countries and cultures not often represented in international conferences."

The assembled expertise in Doha discussed everything from narrative storytelling to the latest in digital skills, media ethics and science ethics, radio production and documentary film-making, and "how to use social media and what that use may mean for the future of journalism," Blum wrote in a pre-conference statement.

The conference took place at the student center of the Qatar Foundation's Education City in Doha, an enterprise that covers 14 square kilometers and serves everyone from schoolchildren to senior researchers from some of the world's leading universities.

And then there is Doha, and Qatar itself. Nadia El-Awady, World Federation of Science Journalists president said, "I've been to Doha many times and have witnessed Qatar's rapid developmental change, including the emergence of a strong science and technology infrastructure." ■

(excerpt) "Science Journalism Under Review As WCSJ2011 Makes History" blog post, www.wfsj.org, June 17, 2011

■ ■ ■

Quest for Democracy and Critical Science Journalism Fused

BY AISLING IRWIN

I've never heard a more passionate plea for rigorous science journalism in the developing world as I did at the closing session of [WCSJ].

Arab science journalists who had been involved in the uprisings of Egypt and Tunisia earlier this year were describing their

Dynamic Speakers Captivated Crowd

experiences. And, for one of them, the events of Tahrir Square were a defining moment not just for his life as a citizen but also as a science journalist.

"Looking ahead I see a huge role for journalism and in particular science journalism," Mohammed Yahia told the meeting. "All our problems are related to science."

So how did he deduce this from his days of rebellion in the square?

It began rather pragmatically. Yahia had been skiving from his duties as editor of *Nature Middle East* to play his part in the epochal events of late January and, after three days, his London bosses rang to inquire when he would be returning to his work.

"I had to come up with a reason to be a science journalist in Tahrir Square," he explained.

And he did. He roamed around finding stories about protesting scientists, angry students, and makeshift instruments being used in contrived hospitals.

"If you looked closely enough there were so many science-related stories...there were tons of stories," he said.

And thus the fight for democracy was fused with the quest for critical science journalism.

Now, as Egypt tries to pull itself together and tackle festering issues such as 40 percent illiteracy and the scarcity of food and water, he sees that science journalists need to be monitoring his country, and in particular its pledge to put science at the heart of its recovery.

"It can't be the passive science journalism that was taking place in many of the state-run agencies. It needs to be more active—we need to push for more freedom."

Afterwards I asked him if his views applied beyond Egypt.

"A lot of people look at science journalism as a form that is not as critical as political journalism," he said. "But that's not right."

"The vast majority of problems that the developing world will be facing in the future are science-related."

"I really think science journalism should be a push to hold people accountable, to

The World Conference of Science Journalists is held every two years under the auspices of the World Federation of Science Journalists. It provides an opportunity for delegates from around the world to develop new skills and understanding about the global reach and impact of science journalism. This year's conference took on added importance and significance by taking place in the Middle East during a period of momentous events that are already reshaping the region.



take a more proactive role.”

A subject close to our hearts at SciDev. Net. ■

“How one man emerged from Tahrir Square with a passion for science journalism,” SciDev. Net, June 30, 2011.

■ ■ ■

Islam is Not Anti-Science

BY NTARYIKE DIVINE, JR.

A famed Egyptian-born scientist has challenged journalists in the Arab world to dispel what he called a widespread and biased idea that Islam is anti-science. Ahmed Zewail, a 1999 Nobel laureate in chemistry, spoke June 27 at the start of the three-day WCSJ2011.

“There is nothing fundamental in Islam against science. It is all part of the unfair perception about Islam and Arabs in general,” Zewail told delegates during a keynote lecture to kick off the conference. He said journalists in the region bear part of the responsibility to help shake off this negative impression.

He urged journalists to pressure especially Western governments to support basic research and education in the developing world, explain the value of science as the precursor of development and highlight success stories to serve as motivation.

Zewail, the Linus Pauling Chair of Chemistry and Professor of Physics at the California Institute of Technology, pointed to 21st-century advances in science, especially the revolution in communications and linked them to the Arab world.

“Today, we are able to visualize and control matter to some extent, decipher the genetic code, direct stem cells towards the making of new organisms, and build telescopes that can look back into time. I was personally involved in the Egyptian Revolution, entirely communicated to the world from Tahrir Square through cell phones, Facebook, iPads, and so on. In my generation, we would have used stones, sticks, and guns,” he said.

He suggested that research groups like the 15-year-old Qatar Foundation, which is

NTARYIKE DIVINE, JR. IS A SCIENCE JOURNALIST FROM CAMEROON.



A Progressive Atmosphere Inspired



hosting the WFSJ conference itself, are an indication that Arab countries are science-friendly. And his native Egypt has plans to create a science and technology city.

The media in the Arab world were his target, not Islam. "There are more than 500 TV channels in the Arab world today," he said. "But unfortunately, most of them are entertainers. How can we create entertainment at the expense of education?"

He said information on the web is not always informative, and the media in general too often opt for sensationalism rather than serious reporting.

Right after he spoke, panelists at a session on "unveiling Arab science," argued that science and Arab science reporting operate amid unique cultural, economic, and religious limitations. Several Arab journalists and researchers agreed their work is frequently hampered by existing tensions between belief and reason.

To illustrate the point, almost none of those interviewed agreed to be identified, but all said science and science journalism in the Arab world was hampered by autocratic regimes—the reason for their reluctance to have their names published—weak infrastructure and inadequate scientific publishing.

But they otherwise tended to agree with Zewail. Moroccan journalist Fatima Yassine said Muslim scientists and scholars have a range of viewpoints on the place and role of science within the context of Islam.

"But the Koran speaks about science clearly and in positive terms in some verses. The Prophet Mohammed also mentions and encourages science several times in the Holy Book. The pursuit of science in general is not in disaccord with Islamic teachings and religious belief, unless [the science] is rooted in evil intentions," she said. ■
"Nobel Prize Winner Says Islam is Not Anti-Science," *www.wfsj.org*, June 27, 2011.

QScience.com Spotlights Qatar Research

BY LYNNE FRIEDMANN

In Dec. 2010, QScience.com was launched as an online portal for a growing range of peer-reviewed, open-access journals focused on the research environment of Qatar (www.qscience.com).

QScience.com already hosts eight scholarly journals (in English) covering diverse subject areas such as cardiology, sustainable energy, education, Middle Eastern healthcare, and Islamic studies. Among the journals offered are:

Aswan Heart Centre Science & Practice Series, an international journal dedicated to keeping cardiologists abreast of advances in basic science and on clinical practice. (www.qscience.com/loi/ahcsp).

Avicenna, a journal whose aim is to inform and stimulate scholarly discussion toward improved delivery of health care in the Middle East (www.qscience.com/loi/avi).

Contemporary Islamic Studies covers contemporary Islamic jurisprudence, Islamic history and civilization, comparative religions and modern Islamic thought, Islamic economics and finance, and

public policy in Islam (www.qscience.com/loi/cis).

Near and Middle East Journal of Research in Education provides an international forum for educators, researchers, and policy makers (www.qscience.com/loi/nmejre).

Sustainable Technologies, Systems, and Policies publishes fundamental and applied research papers, reviews, problem statements, and case studies from the micro through to macro levels associated with the development and implementation of sustainable solutions in the areas of water, energy, and natural resources (www.qscience.com/loi/stsp).

Tassmeem has a special interest in design research in the Middle East that addresses modernization and the preservation of traditions, economic growth, social development, and environmental stewardship.

QScience.com is an offering of Bloomsbury Qatar Foundation Journals (BQFJ), a Qatar-based publisher of Arabic and English books owned by Qatar Foundation for Education, Science, and Community Development (www.qf.org.qa) and managed by Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, one of the world's leading independent publishers (www.bloomsbury.com).

NASW member Emily Alp (ealp@qf.org.qa) is BQFJ senior scientific editor. A journalism graduate of the University of Wisconsin-Madison, she has been involved for more than a decade in science writing and editing: as both a researcher writing her own papers and a member of science/technology editorial teams in organizations such as the Sea Grant Institute, Wisconsin Technology Network, WebMD, and Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar. Alp has lived and worked in Qatar the past three years.

Follow QScience on Facebook at www.facebook.com/QScience and Twitter @QScience.com. ■

Gulf States Need Critical Science Journalism

BY BOTHINA OSAMA AND AISLING IRWIN

Gulf States in the Middle East are pouring millions of dollars into a scientific renaissance—yet journalists are failing to give these initiatives any critical assessment.

Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia are all making huge investments in higher education, science, and technology. Yet questions such as whether these initiatives will actually help the poorest remain unasked, according to [speakers in] a plenary session at WCSJ2011.

"The Middle East is now a very attractive place to report from about science," said Waleed Al-Shobakky, a science writer based in Qatar. "But journalists should have a critical sense to get a balanced story."

"Journalists should avoid stereotypical stories about oil money buying scientific research partnerships," he said. Instead of being astonished by the money spent or the number of research papers published, they should try to report in-depth on details "to see

BOTHINA OSAMA IS MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA REGIONAL NEWS EDITOR AND AISLING IRWIN IS NEWS AND FEATURES EDITOR FOR SciDev.Net.

LYNNE FRIEDMANN IS EDITOR OF *SCIENCEWRITERS*.

how and to what extent this could actually help in developing the region.”

Uncritical reporting is also an issue in other parts of the Middle East, the audience heard. In Iran, where the output of published papers has soared, journalists were criticized for not seeking to understand the reasons for the increase. Much of the research propelling this rise is related to just a few branches of science like physics, mathematics, and nuclear research, said Homayoun Kheyri, a scientist and freelance reporter for the BBC World Service. If journalists looked at the details they would find that “this progress is accidental and not programmed”—this may be a sign of a defect that should be reported on.

Earlier in the day conference delegates heard about an example of Gulf State generosity towards science. Mohamed Fathy Saoud, president of the 15-year-old Qatar Foundation, described his country’s vision for research, saying there was “no ceiling to our aspirations.”

By 2015, Qatar is planning to be investing 2.8 percent of its gross domestic product (GDP) in science and technology research.

Qatar has ambitious measures in place to attract tens of thousands of Arab scientists to work in the country or to collaborate with it from abroad, in an attempt to reverse the brain drain.

It worked with the Texas A&M University—the number one school in the United States in petroleum engineering—to come to the country and set up a branch campus, Saoud said.

Over the next two years, the foundation is also hoping to attract 3,000 researchers, physicians, and medical staff to manage and operate a cluster of medical and research centers.

“This will become the first academic medical center to be created outside North America to promote care, research from the laboratory to the bedside, and medical education,” he said.

In contrast to journalists’ comments, Egypt’s Nobel laureate Ahmed Zewail earlier told the meeting that journalists should be reporting on success stories. The fact that Qatar was turning itself from a desert into a summit of educational excellence was an example of such a story, he said. ■

“Gulf States Need Critical Science Journalism,” www.scidev.net, June 27, 2011.



In China, Everyone Believes in Climate Change

BY SMRITI MALLAPATY

China and the United States may have the burden of climate change in common, but when it comes to reporting the issue they are poles apart.

In both countries, it is hard to find climate change skeptics quoted in the mainstream media but, in the United States the question of belief in the phenomenon, is still important in public discussion and even in the selection of presidential candidates.

In contrast, these questions simply don’t arise in China, where the government has steamrolled a consensus on the science,

according to Richard Stone, news editor for *Science’s* Asia-Pacific office, in Beijing.

“The skeptics don’t have any traction in China,” he told WCSJ2011 delegates.

Chinese journalists have also accepted the science and most of their stories are formulated around how to achieve climate-change related goals. With the government investing heavily in clean-technology projects, there’s much to report on.

In China, as in the United States, climate change is often packaged as a business or entrepreneurial story, sometimes without even mentioning the overused expression.

“But there is a shortage of stories that challenge the government,” says Stone, for example critiquing the government’s importing of timber or oil. ■

“In China, Everyone Believes in Climate Change,” www.scidev.net, June 29, 2011.



Agriculture Reporters Urged to Use Plain Talk With Farmers

BY OLA AL-GHAZAWY

Reporters shifted their attention away from the main news agenda in the Arab world—oil and the struggle for democracy—to food midway through WCSJ2011.

Nadim Khouri, director for the Near East and North Africa for the International Fund for Agricultural Development, told a session on food security that, “Governments have concentrated for too long on improving yields and productivity, but the right thing to do is to focus on improving farmers’ lives.”

“To boost our agriculture production we have to give a great attention to the farmer,” he said, and had advice on how journalists can help.

“When you want to deliver a message to the farmer it has to be simple and clear, as farmers are simple people, so you have to deal with them on that level.

“So do not go to the farmer and talk to him in strange language or use too many scientific terms. This way he can understand and cooperate with you, otherwise he won’t. You also have to show him the benefits from what you are advising him to do, so he will cooperate to boost production. If the farmer loses, you lose as well.”

Khouri said farmers would like to improve production, but widespread illiteracy blocks knowledge about climate, soil conditions, and other factors that affect their ability to grow crops.

He urged “cultivating technology” not just “transferring” technology, because transferring technology may just mean machines and tools that can reduce employment, which leads to other problems.

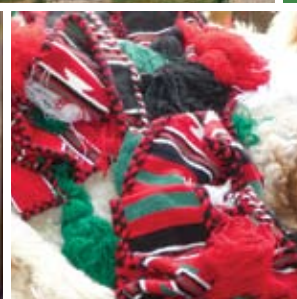
Journalists also heard from Mahmoud El-Solh, director of the International Centre for Agriculture and Research in the Dry Area (ICARDA).



Arabian Oryx, the Symbol of Doha



A City Rich in Culture



"The Arab world faces severe shortages of food combined with price increases, and at the same time we face many obstacles in the way of boosting agriculture production," El-Solh said.

El-Solh said the effects of normal hot weather had been exacerbated by climate change, as rainfall has decreased, temperatures have gone even higher, and new pests and diseases have appeared.

The hot weather has been accompanied by soil deterioration, lack of groundwater, and increases in water salinity, El-Solh said. He said the region also suffers from faulty agricultural policies and not enough agricultural research, on top of political instability which threatens food security in the region.

"I do not want to be pessimistic; there are a lot of ways to escape the poverty trap," El-Solh said.

He said ICARDA is working with other organizations to decrease poverty and to protect natural resources, "and we found that we cannot achieve food security through the current methods, so there has to be a scientific change.

"For example Syria in the early 1980s was importing most of its wheat, but in by the 1990s it began to achieve self sufficiency by using new wheat strains and better irrigation."

He said by applying science, countries can maintain crop yields and decrease the use of pesticides. He gave as an example, an effort in cooperation with Morocco to fight the Sunn pest (also called the corn bug), which attacks cereal crops and has caused serious losses in Iran, Iraq, Syria, Turkey, and Afghanistan.

Trans-border diseases such as Ug99 or black rust which harms wheat, has moved by wind from Uganda to Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan, and then Iran and Yemen. So ICARDA has begun to develop new strains resistant to it. Similarly, yellow rust began in western

Conference delegates were afforded a wealth of opportunities to explore culture, history, and nature in Qatar in the form of regional architecture, culinary offerings, musical traditions, harbor cruises, and desert excursions. The Museum of Islamic Art contains a magnificent collection of artworks dating from the 7th to the 19th century, including manuscripts, ceramics, textiles, wood, and precious stones; and the world-class facilities of Al Shaqab equestrian center have set new standards of excellence in the breeding and showing of Arabian horses.

Asia but began to spread faster because of higher temperatures. ■
“Agricultural Reporters Urged to ‘Talk’ in Plain Language to Farmers,”
www.wfsj.org, July 5, 2011.

■ ■ ■

Finding Skeletons in the Science Closet

BY SARAH CURRY

We often want to know the history of something (cars, relationships, pets) before we invest in it. Learning about the past helps us understand how things, people, and ideas got to where they are today. But often the history or story behind an idea gets left out of science writing.

The WCSJ2011 panel “Uses of the Past: History of Science as a Tool for Science Journalists” featured four writers who argued that peering into the past can be a vital tool to immerse readers in an idea, discover what’s new about a topic, and provide context for a story.

“We have a fascination with science, and we want to tell people just how cool it is (and how it works),” said Deborah Blum, a journalism professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and author of several books. Her latest book, *The Poisoner’s Handbook: Murder and the Birth of Forensic Medicine in Jazz Age New York*, incorporates Blum’s fascination with chemistry.

In an earlier book, *Love in Goon Park*, Blum crafted a biography out of the idea that love matters.

“We didn’t always believe that,” she explained. As evidence, she cited a popular parenting book in the 1920s that advised mothers to kiss their children just once a year to acknowledge them as a possession. More than that would ruin their “moral fiber.” There are also 20th century psychology books that used the word “proximity” when discussing mother-and-child relationships instead of the word “love.”

It takes a unique individual to change a predominant model of the day, and *Love in Goon Park* has one in the story of psychologist Harry Harlow who took on the “impossible challenge of convincing the world that love is a real effect and worth being studied by science,” according to Blum.

“A great way to write a narrative history book is to get your hero in trouble and keep them there,” Blum said. Harlow was perfect as a book subject because he was always in trouble, conducting controversial maternal-separation and social isolation experiments on rhesus monkeys, which demonstrated the importance of care-giving and companionship in social and cognitive development.

Jo Merchant, a freelance writer and editor at *New Scientist*, agreed. Whether it’s telling the story of an individual involved in a specific scientific event, or taking a reader on an intellectual journey through the development of an idea, history can add depth and value to a piece of science journalism by allowing you to write a chronological narrative.

“I think this kind of story is particularly important for science writing because you’re often dealing with complex technical

information that can be quite difficult for the reader to get through,” she said. “So it gives you a way to explain concepts, bit by bit, at the same time having a plot that will make your readers want to keep turning the page.”

Merchant’s recent book, *Decoding the Heavens: A 2,000-Year-Old Computer—and the Century-Long Search to Discover Its Secrets*, weaves together time periods, adding rich texture, contrast, and context for the reader. But even for shorter pieces, such as one on mummy DNA, she often looks to history. It was a controversial topic, but instead of saying “A says this, B says this,” she opted for a giving a historical perspective on the argument.

“That kind of perspective doesn’t tell you who’s right, but I think it gives you a deeper understanding of what’s going on,” she said. “And it gives you a story, instead of static arguments,” she said.

Holly Tucker, a professor of the history of medicine and early French culture and civilization at Vanderbilt University, got the idea for her latest book while researching the first blood transfusions in the 1660s. Unlike others on the panel, she starts with the historical perspective and then asked: “What does this tell us about today?”

“When I start from the early origins, what fascinates me the most is the tensions I see between science and society,” she said.

While it’s hard to imagine modern medicine without blood transfusions, the procedure was feared in the 17th century out of concern that performing transfusions could create hybrid species. Tucker compared those 17th century fears to the modern debate surrounding embryonic stem cell research.

“Whether we’re writing on modern scientific and biomedical innovations, or whether we’re writing stories on specific moments in time in the past, what is the price of a society deciding that certain scientific innovations, and certain practices, should be curtailed?” she asked.

The panel also provided tips on where to look for historical information. Some are familiar research techniques, such as finding original source documents and utilizing online journal archives. But others require being a bit more industrious and practicing old-school journalism. This includes tracking down academic and newspaper articles from the era, as well as personal documents such as letters and diaries.

Getting in touch with descendants of a scientist you are researching can provide unique insights. Also simply picking up the phone and calling a historian of science can be extremely useful, panelists agreed. Visual sources (photos, documentaries) can be equally important, as they can help give you a sense of the time, which will enable you to create rich scenes for your story.

Reto Schneider, deputy editor of *NZZ Folio* the magazine of the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* in Zürich, Switzerland, believes that the history of science should be a subject in its own right.

“News is stuff people don’t know,” he said. “And Newton is news to most people.”

Schneider spends his time telling readers about wacky experiments that have happened throughout history via the magazine he edits, his blog (weirdexperiments.com), and his book (*The Mad Science Book*).

In his experience, readers don’t care if the experiment happened 100 years ago, or yesterday. They like to a good story about something they didn’t know. “They like to be surprised,” he said.

For Schneider, science journalism is more about conveying scientific thought rather than simply espousing the latest scientific findings.

MIAMI-BASED SARAH CURRY IS AN ENVIRONMENTAL JOURNALIST WHO WORKS IN FILM, PRINT, AND ON THE WEB. SHE WAS A LAURA VAN DAM TRAVEL FELLOW TO WCSJ2011.

"Science, after all, is not the distance from the earth to the sun, or the weight of a *T. rex*," he said. "Science is a way to make sense of the world; a method to solve the riddles that surround us everyday. Science is a way of thinking, more than a body of knowledge."

Whether it's finding a quirky scientist to follow or figuring out what popular movies have scientific papers named after them (*Dances with Lympocytes*), the panel acknowledged that it all comes down to telling an intriguing story.

Writing a beautiful narrative about history allows you to be subversive about the way you communicate science, according to Blum.

"I want to figure out ways to write stories in which people are almost tricked into learning about science," she said. "Writing a good story which by the end of it, you're actually going to know a lot about chemistry." ■

■ ■ ■

Qatari Sheik Takes Endangered Bird Species Under His Wing

BY BRIAN VASTAG

Cobalt-plumed and flapping, Jewel, a young Spix's macaw, hops into a plastic bowl. She's well trained in the routine. Her handler, Ryan Watson, sets the bowl on a scale. He's pleased. The 4-month-old parrot is growing.

If Jewel continues to thrive, Watson will soon move her and a companion—a second young macaw shrieking at the far end of the pair's long enclosure—to a larger aviary, where they will flock with others of their kind.

Though the distance of the move will be short, it has far-reaching implications: It will foster fledgling hope that this rarest of parrots can be saved. Just 76 of the handsome blue birds—endemic to northern Brazil but unseen there in 11 years—are known to exist, all in captivity. Watson was hired by a member of Qatar's royal family, Sheik Saoud bin Mohammed bin Ali al-Thani, to rescue the species from the edge of extinction and send it soaring back into the Brazilian jungle.

It's an audacious plan in an improbable locale, this oil-and-gas-rich kingdom on the Arabian Peninsula. With no signs marking it in the flat, arid landscape, a fenced private wildlife compound extends across 1.6 square miles about 20 miles west of the capitol, Doha.

Al-Wabra Wildlife Preservation began as a private menagerie with a questionable past. But it has been transformed into an intensive conservation operation. The desert preserve is owned by Saoud, a keen collector of rare beauties, including Islamic antiquities for his home and, here, slender gazelles, brilliant birds of paradise, Arabian sand cats and majestic macaws.

Aviaries, breeding enclosures, antelope runs and primate houses shelter about 2,000 animals from 90 rare and endangered species. A staff of 200—including four veterinarians and five biologists—maintains the compound and cares for the animals, kept in 480 enclosures.

Private menageries are common in the region, said Watson, a 33-year-old Australian who heads the blue macaw breeding program. And the preserve once fit that unflattering description. "We make no secret that the sheik collected animals from black-market dealers, from the wild, from wherever he could," Watson said. Before 2001, when Qatar signed a key international treaty, known as Cites, restricting trade in endangered animals, it was not illegal to import rare animals.

Which is exactly what Saoud did after he inherited the compound. But a 1999 incident triggered a conservation awakening. After Saoud flew rare Beira antelopes out of East Africa, local elders accused him of poaching, according to a BBC report that year.

"That's the last time there's been any of that kind of activity," Watson said. "We've made the transition from hobby farm to the breeding center we are now."

The preserve breeds its animals, does exchanges with other facilities and, on the rare occasion, rescues animals, as it did in 2006, adopting four South American golden-headed tamarins found dehydrated on the back of a truck in Qatar. That was the last new species added to the collection.

The turnabout has garnered allies in the conservation community, and the staff regularly collaborates with international experts. They discuss their successes as well as their failures.

Such as the half-million dollars the sheik paid to protect the dibatag antelope of Ethiopia. The money was, as Watson puts it, "flushed down the toilet" when a newly built compound was raided there. On the preserve, tuberculosis ripped through a herd of Beira antelopes, dropping the population from 60 to 19. (Although a bounding 10-week-old Beira in a pen suggests the worst of the outbreak is over.)

Since arriving at al-Wabra preserve in 2005, Watson has overseen the hatching of 24 Spix's macaws. Combined with birds bought from a commercial breeder in the Philippines and a collector in Switzerland, the facility shelters 55 Spix's macaws, nearly 75 percent of the world's known population.

"The bottom line is, the future of the species now rests in the hands of the sheik," said Russell Mittermeier, president of Conservation International. Or, perhaps more accurately, in the hands of Watson.

GENETIC BOTTLENECK

But the going is tough. "The birds don't do very well in captivity," Watson said, leading visitors past an antelope run and toward an aviary. Many of the older birds—they can live for 30 years or longer—suffer from weak kidneys, the result of dehydration when they were smuggled from Brazil to private collectors decades ago.

A more worrisome problem is the genetic bottleneck caused by extreme inbreeding. All but four of the surviving birds descended from a brother-sister pair kept by the Swiss breeder. As a result, only 2 percent of eggs laid by second-generation captive females hatch. Tests allow breeders to select pairs with the greatest genetic diversity, but those couples don't always produce eggs.

And for unknown reasons, the hatchlings that do emerge skew heavily female. Because Spix's macaws form strong pair bonds, that means a gender balance will ultimately be required for the species to thrive.

BIRD continued on page 33

BRIAN VASTAG, IS A SCIENCE REPORTER AT THE WASHINGTON POST. HE WAS A LAURA VAN DAM TRAVEL FELLOW TO WCSJ2011.

■ ■ ■

Social Media Helps Solve An Illness Outbreak

BY MARYN McKENNA

By the time WCSJ2011 opened in late June, organizers felt entitled to breathe a sigh of relief. The biennial international conference had come together despite a last-minute relocation from conflict-ridden Cairo, Egypt, to Doha, Qatar, and the attendees had arrived mostly without incident.

We (I was a speaker and panel organizer) plunged into four days of field trips, panels, debates, dinners in the souq, and late-night searches through Doha's bizarre Shanghai-Disney skyscrapers for the few bars that serve alcohol to foreigners. All seemed well.

Until about the third day. Suddenly, there were more seats available in the meeting rooms and more chatter under the conference's Twitter hashtag, #wcsj2011—and a good portion of the chatter was now adorned with a second hashtag, #dohabug. Some portion of the attendees had been confined to their hotel rooms—or worse, sent in search of medical care—by what appeared to be a fast-striking foodborne illness.

The complaints increased in number as the attendees went home, and some of their descriptions were dire: flattened for a week, requiring IV fluids, hospitalized. Almost everyone had a hypothesis: It was the fish. It was the scrambled eggs. It was something at the Ezdan Hotel, the deluxe yet mysteriously scruffy property where most of us stayed.

I escaped the bug, but as someone who writes about disease detection, I thought the situation presented a rare opportunity: an outbreak that was recognized early, in a well-defined group that had both established communication channels and personal and professional reasons to want to know what happened. I am not an epidemiologist, so I asked a Twitter friend, @EpiRen (in real life, Rene Najera, MPH, who is a professional epi) to help organize a survey to analyze what went on.

I reconstructed menus for the various meals (most of them buffets) with the help of the conference staff. Rene wrote a multi-

MARYN McKENNA IS A FREELANCE JOURNALIST AND AUTHOR WHO SPECIALIZES IN PUBLIC HEALTH, HEALTH POLICY, AND MEDICINE.

WCSJ2011 in the News



page survey and converted it into a GoogleDocs form. I circulated news of the survey in the second week of July via email and Twitter, using the same hashtags, #wcsj2011 and #dohabug. Rene analyzed the 179 replies, 63 of which came from people who were sick.

To save the WFSJ from any appearance of liability, we published the results on my Tumblr, *The Further Adventures of Germ Girl*, on Aug. 9. We were not able to definitively solve the outbreak—that would have required extra steps such as refrigerator searches and culture data—but we were able to define the epidemic curve, pin the exposure to a meal on June 27 or 28, and generate a solid hypothesis. Based on test results received independently by four respondents, we believe that #dohabug was Salmonella.

The graphed results and Rene's narrative explaining them are at: <http://germgirl.tumblr.com/post/8704840137/wcsj-illness-survey-results-here-are-the-results> ■

■ ■ ■

Arab-Israeli Tensions Caused Disruptions

BY ELI KINTISCH

By all accounts, [WCSJ2011] was an impressive feat, marking the first iteration of the conference hosted by an Arab nation. More than 120 Arab science journalists attended, and half of the 724 attendees were from developing countries. Previous WCSJ meetings had lacked such turnout from those sectors. BBC reporter Pallab Ghosh, a former president of the World Federation of Science Journalists, which sponsored the conference, said it was “for the first time a truly international [science journalism] meeting.”

But behind the scenes, political problems caused extensive debate and several disruptions. The inclusion of U.S.-Israeli journalist Anna Wexler on a panel caused divisions within the Arab Science Journalists Association (ASJA), a co-sponsor of the conference. After Egyptian reporter Bothaina Osama objected to appearing on a panel with her, meeting organizers removed Wexler from that panel and gave her a spot on a different session with no Arab speakers. Under pressure from their journalists' union that objected to Wexler's presence, two Jordanian journalists decided to boycott the meeting altogether; they may be removed from an international science journalism training program as a result. Meanwhile, Israel barred a Palestinian journalism professor from attending the event.

“In this region you have to expect there will be sensitivities on these issues,” says Nadia El-Awady, the conference co-chair.

Wexler, who holds U.S. and Israeli citizenship, was slated months before the conference to appear on a panel about science reporting in non-English languages with three other reporters.

Both Qatar and Egypt, the original site of the conference, had agreed that Israeli reporters could participate in the event; Egyptian authorities even offered to help Wexler with visa issues. (The *DISRUPTIONS* continued on page 32

ELI KINTISCH IS A REPORTER FOR SCIENCE MAGAZINE.

■ ■ ■

Coming Full Circle: Post-Doha Workshop In Cairo

BY DEBORAH BLUM

When we first started planning WCSJ2011, it was going to be held in Egypt. And then, of course, history intervened.

The Arab Spring, the uprising against Hosni Mubarak, and the instability in Egypt turned all our plans into uncertainty. We accepted (with gratitude) an offer from the Qatar Foundation to relocate the conference to Doha, Qatar.

There were regrets, of course. The U.S. Embassy in Cairo had embraced the idea of our conference, which coincided with a scheduled event, the U.S.-Egypt Year of Science. The embassy had agreed to provide funding for several of our speakers as long as they agreed to stay on and do additional talks around the country. There was deep disappointment over the lost opportunity.

By June, however, Egypt had stabilized and a U.S. State Department travel advisory against visiting the country had been lifted. The embassy approached conference organizers with an offer to cover costs if we would organize a post-conference workshop and bring to Cairo some American science writers attending the Doha meeting.

With the conference just weeks away, I sent out an emergency call to NASW conference speakers who might be open to changing their travel plans at the last minute. As always, I was struck by the generosity of our members in being willing to give their time and expertise. In short order, we'd assembled a group consisting of Beryl Benderly, Curtis Brainard, David Dobbes, Christ Mooney, and myself.

Working with the State Department, we put together a workshop that focused on everything from investigative to narrative science journalism. Almost 40 Egyptian science journalists attended, and it's fair to say that we learned from them as well.

...I was struck by the generosity of our members in being willing to give their time and expertise.

They were smart, they were educated, and they were passionate about their work. They gave us insights into environmental issues ranging from salt infiltration of the Nile (due to the rising of warming seas at its mouth) to chemical leakage from garbage.

They were tough on their own country's policies and they were justly critical of some of ours. When Curtis Brainard talked about coverage of climate change, one of the Egyptian writers noted that the United States has failed to lead internationally in responding to the challenge. “Couldn't agree with you more,” Curtis responded. And that was one of the best things about our visit—the discovery and reminder of common ground.

On our last day, two of our Egyptian friends, Nadia El-Awady, a co-organizer of the Doha conference, and Mohammed Yahia, of *Nature Middle East*, walked us through Tahrir Square, home of the Egyptian revolution, and reminded us of another point of common ground—a shared love of hard-won democracy and fundamental human rights. ■

DEBORAH BLUM CHAIRED THE WCSJ2011 PROGRAM COMMITTEE.

The following NASW members gave generously of their time and talent on the WCSJ2011 program committee, as panel moderators, and as speakers. Thank you!

WCSJ2011 VOLUNTEERS

Marc Abrahams
Emily Alp
Beryl Benderly
Estrella Burgos
Deborah Blum
Jon Cohen
Jim Cornell
Wilson da Silva
Tinsley Davis
Mariette DiChristina
David Dobbs
Dan Fagin
Robert Finn
Peggy Girshman
Phil Hilts
Robert Lee Hotz
Erin Kapp
Kendrick Frazier
Lynne Friedmann
Thomas Levenson
Bruce Lewenstein
Maryn McKenna
Ivan Oransky
Jennifer Ouellete
Joe Palca
Ginger Pinholster
Rosalind Reid
Cristine Russell
Reto Schneider
Nancy Shute
Tom Siegfried
William Skane
Richard Stone
Holly Tucker
Fabio Turone
Alexandra Witze



Finnish Association of Science Editors and Journalists delegates following their conference bid presentation at the Doha meeting.

Finnish Association of Science Editors and Journalists to Host WCSJ2013

The Finnish Association of Science Editors and Journalists (FASEJ) will host the next World Conference of Science Journalists. In partnership with the University of Helsinki, FASEJ will bring the conference to Helsinki, Finland, June 24 to 28, 2013, on the Helsinki University City Campus.

Organizers of WCSJ2013 promise a conference with an emphasis on more interactive discussions, a multicultural perspective to issues, and an even more diverse audience with delegates from all parts of the world bringing with them the different cultural, social, and political backgrounds of the environments in which they work.

"We want people attending to be from as diverse regions as possible and then we explore what we have in common so that we can all learn something new," said FASEJ board member Paivi Kapiainen-Heiskanen.

WCSJ2013 will be the largest event that FASEJ will organize to date. "It will also offer us an opportunity to showcase the achievements of Finnish science and science communication to a global audience," said Vesa Niinikangas, elected president of the World Federation of Science Journalists at the Doha, held in June.

"Science journalists work in the public sphere. In part, the center of this sphere has already moved to the Internet and social media," said Niinikangas. "It is important to remember that science journalists are not promoters. Instead, they must be able to critically evaluate scientific information in order to communicate it to wide audiences."

In Helsinki, the conference program will be based more on discussion and interaction than before. The goals include collaborating, sharing views and experiences, and learning from one another.

The 2013 World Conference of Science

Journalists will be held in the main building of the University of Helsinki. Its historical and architectural significance, as well as its location in the heart of Helsinki, make it an ideal venue for the conference.

"We intend to have less time for speakers and give more time to delegates to talk, so as [to] make sessions more interactive," said Raili Leino, another FASEJ board member.

"The major theme will be digital media, with topics on the place of science journalism in the era of new media, and how new ways of gathering, reporting and marketing have changed science reporting," said Ulla Jarvi, chair of the program committee.

Planning and organization for the 2013 conference is already underway FASEJ looks forward to welcoming you to Helsinki in 2013. ■

(source: FASEJ website and SciDev.Net)

*...an opportunity to
showcase the achievements
of Finnish science and
science communication to a
global audience.*

Mistakes in Scientific Studies Surge

BY GAUTAM NAIK

It was the kind of study that made doctors around the world sit up and take notice: Two popular high-blood-pressure drugs were found to be much better in combination than either alone.

"There was a 'wow' reaction," recalls Franz Messerli, a New York doctor who, like many others, changed his prescription habits after the 2003 report.

Unfortunately, it wasn't true. Six and a half years later, the prestigious medical journal *The Lancet* retracted the paper, citing "serious concerns" about the findings.

The damage was done. Doctors by then had given the drug combination to well over 100,000 patients. Instead of protecting them from kidney problems, as the study said the drug combo could do, it left them more vulnerable to potentially life-threatening side effects, later studies showed. Today, "tens of thousands" of patients are still on the dual therapy, according to research firm SDI.

When a study is retracted, "it can be hard to make its effects go away," says Sheldon Tobe, a kidney-disease specialist at the University of Toronto.

And that's more important today than ever because retractions of scientific studies are surging.

Since 2001, while the number of papers published in research journals has risen 44 percent, the number retracted has leapt more than 15-fold, data compiled for the *Wall Street Journal* by Thomson Reuters reveal.

Just 22 retraction notices appeared in 2001, but 139 in 2006, and 339 last year. Through seven months of this year, there have been 210, according to Thomson Reuters Web of Science, an index of 11,600 peer-reviewed journals world-wide (<http://bit.ly/h7foRe>).

In a sign of the times, a blog called "Retraction Watch" has popped up to monitor the flow (<http://retractionwatch.wordpress.com/>).

Science is based on trust, and most researchers accept findings published in peer-reviewed journals. The studies spur others to embark on related avenues of research, so if one paper is later found to be tainted, an entire edifice of work comes into doubt. Millions of dollars' worth of private and government funding may go to waste, and, in the case of medical science, patients can be put at risk.

At the Mayo Clinic, a decade of cancer research, partly taxpayer-funded, went down the drain when the prestigious Minnesota institution concluded that intriguing data about harnessing the immune system to fight cancer had been fabricated. Seventeen scholarly papers published in nine research journals had to be retracted. A researcher, who protests his innocence, was fired.

In another major flameout, 18 research journals have said they are planning to retract a total of 89 published studies by a German anesthesiologist, many concerning a drug used for maintaining blood pressure during surgery. Authorities in Britain now are reviewing their usage guidelines as a result, and a prosecutor in Germany is conducting a criminal probe, which he says includes the possibility that data were fabricated. The anesthesiologist couldn't be reached for comment.

Why the backpedaling on more and more scientific research? Some scientific journals argue that the increase could indicate the journals have become better at detecting errors. They point to how software has made it easier to uncover plagiarism.

Others claim to find the cause in a more competitive landscape, both for the growing numbers of working scientific researchers who want to publish to advance their careers, and for research journals themselves.

"The stakes are so high," said *The Lancet's* editor, Richard Horton. "A single paper in *Lancet* and you get your chair and you get your money. It's your passport to success."

Retractions related to fraud showed a more than sevenfold increase between 2004 and 2009, exceeding the twofold rise in retractions related to mere error, according to an analysis published in the *Journal of Medical Ethics*. The analyst, Grant Steen, reached that conclusion after studying 742 medicine and biology papers that were withdrawn from 2000 to 2010. He said 73.5 percent were retracted simply for error but 26.6 percent were retracted for fraud.

Another researcher, John Budd of the University of Missouri-Columbia, looked at roughly the same set of journals, though over a longer period, and also found the prevalence of scientific misconduct to be on the increase.

The Lancet, founded in England in 1823, is among the world's most influential science publications. Just as research published in *The Lancet* can have a significant impact, so can the withdrawal of a *Lancet* paper, especially after it has been in the public domain and influencing scientific thought for years.

In a notorious case, *The Lancet* last year retracted a study claiming a link between autism and the measles-mumps-rubella vaccine—12 years after it was published. In the intervening years, measles cases spiked in the U.K. as some parents refused to let their children be vaccinated. The lead investigator on the now-retracted study, Andrew Wakefield, was stripped of his license to practice medicine in Britain after authorities concluded that he had engaged in "serious professional misconduct."

In an emailed response, Dr. Wakefield says he continues to defend his research, both "the findings and the conclusions."

The Lancet issued just a single retraction notice from 2001 through 2005, but five in the next five years, according to Thomson Reuters. They included the one finding great promise in the combined use of two common blood-pressure drugs. The case illustrates both why it can take so long to pull a flawed study and the fallout that can result.

One of the blood-pressure drugs, called an ACE inhibitor, relaxes blood vessels by preventing the body from creating a particular hormone. The other drug, called an ARB, acts on the same hormonal system

GAUTAM NAIK IS A STAFF REPORTER FOR THE *WALL STREET JOURNAL*.

but in a different way.

High blood pressure can lead to kidney damage, and each of the two common drugs reduces a sign of impending kidney disease—the loss of protein through the urinary system.

A Japanese researcher, Naoyuki Nakao, wondered if using both drugs at once would be even better at reducing this sign of kidney trouble. Sure enough, he reported that the combo was dramatically better than either drug alone.

The Lancet published his study, dubbed “Cooperate,” in January 2003. It jumped to the No. 2 spot among the most-cited papers published by *The Lancet* that month and created a buzz at medical conferences.

Doctors increasingly prescribed the dual therapy. By 2008, about 140,000 patients in the U.S. were on it, according to SDI, the research firm.

But the report struck some kidney-disease specialists in Switzerland as too good to be true. The report said patients given the drug combo saw a 76 percent decrease in protein loss, compared with 42 percent with one drug by itself and 44 percent with the other one alone. To see such a dramatic difference was unusual, says one of the Swiss doctors, Regina Kunz, who also was dubious of a particular statistical result in the study.

“It was too perfect an effect. You wouldn’t expect it with such a small sample size,” says Dr. Kunz, director of the Academy of Insurance Medicine in Basel. “I think the peer reviewers should have caught it.”

She and three colleagues wrote to *The Lancet* in 2006 urging it to look into the matter. *The Lancet*’s editor, Dr. Horton, says the journal passed their concerns on to Dr. Nakao in Japan, who responded with some “recalculations.”

The Lancet then passed all this material on an independent reviewer, who concluded in December 2006 that “it was impossible to tell whether data in the [original paper] were the result of fraud or incompetence,” according to Dr. Horton.

The Lancet tried to get Dr. Nakao to respond, “but he seemed to

be prevaricating,” according to Dr. Horton. Dr. Nakao, now at Isekai Hospital in Osaka, declined to be interviewed.

In May 2008, *The Lancet* published a “letter of concern” by the Swiss doctors who had first written to the journal in 2006. The letter wondered whether certain inconsistencies were “only a case of extremely sloppy reporting or a hint towards more severe problems with the data.”

The Lancet now took the matter to another outside group, a U.K. nonprofit called the Committee on Publication Ethics. According to Dr. Horton, it decided the work was incompetent rather than fraudulent.

The Lancet then wrote to a Japanese hospital where Dr. Nakao worked when he published his study. This hospital said it would do an investigation, but it would take six months.

Pressure mounted. Dr. Messerli in New York, a cardiologist, wrote to *The Lancet* in mid-2009 arguing that it had a “moral obligation” to withdraw the paper. *The Lancet* said it would await the results of the hospital investigation.

The hospital investigating committee examined medical records at another Japanese hospital where Dr. Nakao said he and his colleagues had done the research on 336 patients. But committee members “were not able to identify even a single patient who matched the contents of the paper,” said Yutuka Sanada, the president of the hospital that investigated, called Showa University Fujigaoka Hospital, in Yokohama.

“Dr. Nakao was not able to explain” this, he added, but “insisted that his paper was not a fabricated one.”

The investigation took until the summer of 2009, about a year after *The Lancet* first contacted the university hospital.

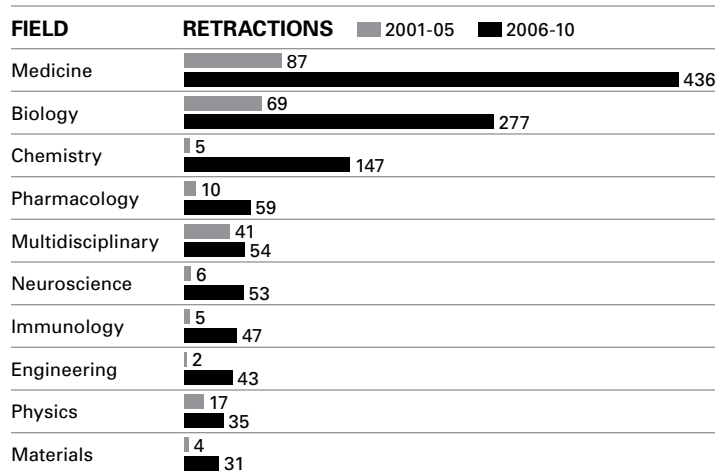
“We should have raised the alarm with the university earlier,” Dr. Horton now says.

In Oct. 2009, nearly seven years after *The Lancet* published the blood-pressure study and three years after questions were raised
SURGE continued on page 32

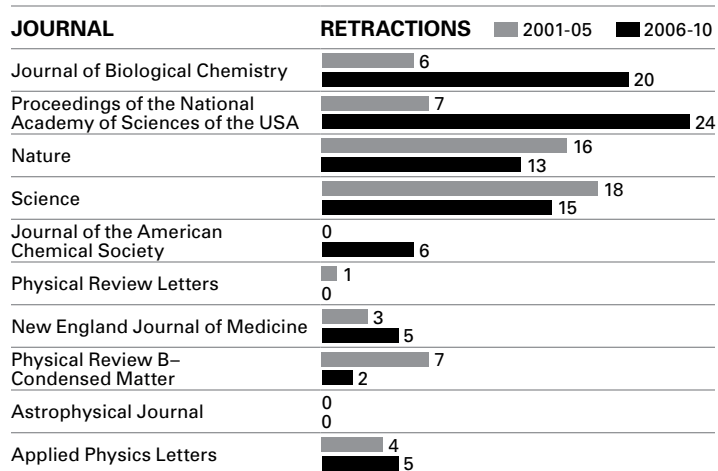
*When a study is retracted,
it can be hard to make its
effects go away...*

Rising Retraction Rates Suggest More Published Findings Are Unreliable, Cannot Be Replicated, or Are Simply Wrong

Retractions are rising across most fields:



Top science journals ranked by total citations:



Data courtesy of the Wall Street Journal. Sources: Thomson Reuters (retractions by field and journal): R. Grant Seen, Journal of Medical Ethics, Dec 2010

Scholarly Pursuits

Academic research relevant to the workaday world
of science writing

BY BEN CAROLLO AND RICK BORCHELT

Science and Risk Communication: Two Peas in a Pod or Mars and Venus?

The areas of science and risk communication are inherently linked—and in more complex ways than one may think.

From time to time, all science writers likely will find themselves writing about risk. Those of us who work in the biomedical sciences and emerging technology fields may find ourselves in this position more often than others—and sometimes quite overtly—but issues of risk can creep into all of our work to varying degrees, whether we are writing about a meteor shower or genetically modified organisms (or earthquakes and hurricanes, as East Coast writers experienced as this article was being prepared).

There is a good deal of academic research that focuses on risk communication, social construction of risk, and how certain theories apply to communicating with specific populations about specific issues. We saw several papers over the last few months that really help provide some context about the world views of our audiences.

■ ■ ■

Russell, Laura D. and Austin S. Babrow. Risk in the Making: Narrative, Problematic Integration, and the Social Construction of Risk. *Communication Theory* 21(3) (2011) 239-260.

Science writers often talk about the importance of narrative in effectively communicating about science. The authors here explore the role that narrative plays in social construction of risk, ultimately

evaluating news coverage of contemporary risks and using this analysis to pose several ways in which risk can be understood as a social construction.

Russell and Babrow spend a great deal of time reviewing the literature related to narrative construction and problematic integration, but there are several recurring themes. The first theme relates to how we use narratives to construct reality and how without them we would not be able to understand the world around us and the cultures in which we live. A second theme is the importance of temporal construction to these narratives and how past events are seen as causes for current events and that future events are determined by past and present actions. Finally, the way we conceive of the world, and thus risk, through narratives is a social construction that is self-reinforcing—and highly dependent on cultural cues.

The authors use various frameworks for conceiving of risk, but these frameworks generally focus on risk as occurring when there is some level of uncertainty for our well-being thrown into the narrative. In the temporal frame, this means that past events lead us to have uncertainty in the present about future outcomes. This is where science is introduced to the picture, as science narratives provide understanding of our experience as well as hold implications for our well-being. As the article notes, “To see risk...we must be able to foresee potentially adverse consequences of our actions, we must be able to choose freely among alternative actions, and we must in fact choose and enact those choices

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BEN CAROLLO LEADS THE ISSUES ANALYSIS AND RESPONSE TEAM AT THE NATIONAL CANCER INSTITUTE AT NIH. RICK BORCHELT IS SPECIAL ASSISTANT FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS TO THE DIRECTOR OF THE NATIONAL CANCER INSTITUTE AT NIH.

(including inaction).” Without science, this becomes significantly more complicated. But science is a double-edged sword when it comes to risk: in addition to providing a narrative about the known, science introduces an element of uncertainty, as in many cases we are entirely unable to predict what will happen as a result of scientific innovation.

Russell and Babrow also note that if risk is a social construction, our conception of risk is dependent on communication with

*...issues of risk can creep
into all of our work to
varying degrees...*

other individuals and entities in society. In particular, they look at the implications of this concept as it applies to news coverage of risks. In the context of the importance of temporal construction, they assert that the approach to constructing a traditional news story (the five Ws and H) is really only appropriate when covering an acute risk with readily ascertainable dimensions. When the story becomes complex, a simple event structure does not provide enough alternatives to construct a complete narrative, thus introducing a greater perception of risk. The authors do not pose an alternative, but suggest that there are many ways that communication contributes to how people construct risk narratives for themselves and that our approaches to doing so will evolve over time.

■ ■ ■

Alum, Nick. What Makes Some People Think Astrology is Scientific? *Science Communication* published online 13 December 2010. [Accessed online 8/31/11 at <http://scx.sagepub.com/content/early/2010/12/04/1075547010389819>]

“It is one thing to read an astrology column for amusement or entertainment but quite another to believe that astrological predictions about events or personality will come true,” Alum notes in his look at perceptions of astrology and the implications this might have for those engaging the public about scientific issues. He explains why some people may place stock in astrology by analyzing European Commission data from the Special

Eurobarometer 224 and 225 surveys, so keep in mind that there may be some Euro-specific cultural influences at play.

The author’s research questions focus generally on how scientific literacy affects an individual’s ability to distinguish science from pseudoscience, if misunderstanding about the nature of astrology contributes to faith in astrology, and whether ascribing to authoritarian values contributes to faith in astrology. As a Cancerian and a Taurean, we find some of the results to be quite fascinating. Of particular interest, more respondents rated astrology as “very scientific” than “not at all scientific,” while for the alternate term horoscopes, the majority of respondents saw horoscopes as “not at all scientific.” We should note that astrology was seen as slightly more scientific than economics, but only slightly less scientific than psychology. Further analysis suggests that, even though horoscopes and astrology are essentially the same thing, perceptions varied greatly on the choice of word used to describe the topic. Alum analyzed these results using various quantitative approaches, and he ascribes 17 percent of the variance in responses to this semantic confusion.

Additionally, not surprisingly, higher scientific literacy (having formal science knowledge) is positively associated with an ability to distinguish between science and pseudoscience. However, being well-educated and having a college degree was not seen, on its own, as enough to make a difference in perceptions. The author suggests that, though his analysis did not look at these issues, this finding may apply in the context of individuals making health and consumer choices as they navigate pseudoscience in their daily lives, as might be the case when a consumer considers various homeopathic remedies for an ailment or contemplates purchasing a “miracle” wrinkle cream advertised in a late-night infomercial.

*...more respondents rated
astrology as “very
scientific;”...the alternate
term horoscopes was viewed
as “not at all scientific.”*

■ ■ ■

Heiss, Sarah N. “Healthy” discussions about risk: the Corn Refiners Association’s strategic negotiation of authority in the debate over high fructose corn syrup. *Public Understanding of Science* published online 31 March 2011. [Accessed online 8/31/11 at <http://pus.sagepub.com/content/early/2011/03/30/0963662511402281>]

The author begins this article by citing D.A. Lupton: “Though many substances can be consumed, cultural beliefs and traditions shape public understandings of what is edible, what is safe, what is healthy, and what is just too risky to eat,” taking us down the path of looking at some real life implications of the theories advanced by Russell and Austin. Heiss notes the lack of

*...the public was consistently
portrayed as uninformed
and unable to process basic
scientific information.*

neutrality in risk discourses, which adds an additional dimension to the conversation. Here, she has chosen to undertake a close textual analysis to explore the rhetorical approach taken by the Corn Refiners Association (CRA) to influence the national dialogue about high fructose corn syrup (HFCS) in its “Sweet Surprise” campaign, which sought to create a “healthy discussion” about HFCS in light of studies that suggested a link between HFCS and obesity.

The author’s analysis of the various advertisements shows that the CRA relied heavily on a deficit model to construct a narrative where only certain stakeholders held relevant opinions. The campaign emphasized the use of generalized “health expert” figures to promote a discussion that focused on integrating HFCS as part of a “balanced” diet, creating a narrative

SCHOLARLY PURSUITS continued on page 33

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IRS Changes Mileage-Deduction Rates for 2011

BY JULIAN BLOCK

Freelancers and other individuals who travel for business reasons can deduct their actual car expenses. Their deductible items include gas, oil, tires, repairs, license tags, registration fees, insurance, garage rent, lease payments, parking fees, tolls, and depreciation.

As an alternative to writing off actual expenses, they may be able to claim a standard mileage rate that's adjusted annually to reflect inflation. While gas is a major factor in the optional figure, the Internal Revenue Service also considers other items, such as insurance and the price of new vehicles. (Just to be clear, the Internal Revenue defines "cars" to include vans, pickups, and panel trucks.) The advantage of the optional rate is that it eliminates the extra burden of tracking actual costs; records need to be kept only of business miles driven for the year in question.

In late June, the IRS responded to recent increases in gas prices by boosting 2011's previously announced mileage rate of 51 cents per mile. It stays 51 cents for the first six months and rises to 55.5 cents for the final six.

The mileage rate is a benchmark used by federal and state governments and many employers to reimburse employees for their mileage. Employees can deduct actual expenses that exceed reimbursements.

Besides claiming actual expenses or the mileage allowance, remember to take a separate deduction for parking fees, as well as bridge, tunnel, and turnpike tolls that you pay while on business.

To illustrate, you use the mileage rate for 2011. Business driving is 800 miles during the first six months and 400 miles during the final six months. You pay \$50 for parking charges and bridge tolls. Your allowable deduction: \$680 (800 miles times 51 cents equals \$408 and 400 miles times 55.5 cents equals \$222, plus \$50 parking).

The agency's auditors often question car expenses. They accept standard-rate deductions only when there are adequate records substantiating the miles driven. To be on the safe side, keep glove-compartment diaries or other records that note why and how far you went and what you shelled out for parking and tolls. Diary entries are more persuasive when made close to when the trips occur, not when filing deadlines loom.

Auditors also are unforgiving if you fail to observe speed limits. They throw out deductions for traffic tickets.

The write-off rules are less generous for people who need medical care and drive to and from doctors, clinics, hospitals and the like or when they move for job-related reasons and use their cars to transport themselves, members of their households or their belongings. They're able to deduct actual costs of gas and oil or a standard rate. For 2011, it's 19 cents for the first six months and 23.5 cents for the final six months.

Those rules are downright chintzy for persons who use their cars to perform services for such charitable organizations as schools and religious institutions. They can deduct actual costs of gas or oil or a standard rate. It's 14 cents for all of 2011, a rate fixed by law. ■

*Auditors are unforgiving
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limits. They throw out
deductions for traffic tickets.*

JULIAN BLOCK IS AN ATTORNEY AND AUTHOR BASED IN LARCHMONT, N.Y. HE HAS BEEN CITED AS "A LEADING TAX PROFESSIONAL" (*NEW YORK TIMES*), "AN ACCOMPLISHED WRITER ON TAXES" (*WALL STREET JOURNAL*) AND "AN AUTHORITY ON TAX PLANNING" (*FINANCIAL PLANNING MAGAZINE*). FOR INFORMATION ABOUT HIS BOOKS, VISIT JULIANBLOCKTAXEXPERT.COM.

NAS 2011 Communication Awards Announced

The 2011 Communication Awards have been announced by the National Academy of Sciences, National Academy of Engineering, and Institute of Medicine. Supported by the W.M. Keck Foundation as part of the Keck Futures Initiative, these awards—each of which includes a \$20,000 prize—recognize excellence in reporting and communicating science, engineering, and medicine to the general public.

For the first time, the judges selected a repeat winner. In the awards' inaugural year (2003), *New York Times* science correspondent Andrew Revkin won in the magazine/newspaper category for his coverage of the environment and climate change. This year, he has been recognized for pioneering work in online environmental journalism in his *New York Times* "Dot Earth" blog (<http://dotearth.blogs.nytimes.com>).

Selected from more than 300 print, broadcast, and Internet entries, the

recipients of the awards for works published or aired in 2010 are:

BOOK

Rebecca Skloot (author) for *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* (Crown Books, a division of Random House)

FILM/RADIO/TV

Alexa Elliott (producer) and **WPBT2 Production Team** for "Changing Seas: Sentinels of the Seas," South Florida Public Television (WPBT2)

MAGAZINE/NEWSPAPER

Amy Harmon, *New York Times* national correspondent, for "Target: Cancer"

ONLINE

Andrew Revkin, senior fellow for environmental understanding, Pace University, and *New York Times* blogger, for "Dot Earth" Blog, *New York Times* ■

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BOOKS

BY AND FOR MEMBERS



Ruth Winter
44 Holly Drive, Short Hills, NJ 07078
or email ruthwrite@aol.com

Send material about new books

Microsoft Word files only. Include the name of the publicist and appropriate contact information, as well as how you prefer members get in touch with you.

Rambunctious Garden: Saving Nature in a Post-Wild World
by Emma Marris
(NASW), published
by Bloomsbury



Marris is a freelance writer based in Columbia, Mo., who writes about the environment, evolution, energy, agriculture, food, language, books, and film. *Rambunctious Garden* is her first book. As humans change every centimeter of Earth, from what species live where to its very climate, strategies for saving nature must change. Marris's book explains why, and more importantly, how. She argues convincingly that it is time to look forward and create the "rambunctious garden," a hybrid of wild nature and human management. In this optimistic book, readers meet leading scientists and environmentalists; visit imaginary Edens, designer ecosystems, and Pleistocene parks. Marris describes innovative conservation approaches, including re-wilding, assisted migration, and the embrace of so-called novel ecosystems. *Rambunctious Garden* is short on gloom and long on interesting theories and fascinating narratives, all of which bring home the idea that we must give up our romantic notions of pristine wilderness and replace them with the concept of a global, half-wild rambunctious garden planet, tended by us. ■ Contact Marris at e.marris@gmail.com. The book's website is www.emmamarris.com. Book's publicist is Jonathan Kroberger at jonathan.kroberger@bloomsbury.com and 646-307-5591.

Soft Tissue Sarcomas: Current and Emerging Trends in Detection and Treatment
by Michael E. Newman
(NASW), published
by Rosen Publishing



Newman is a Derwood, Md., freelance science and medical writer. *Soft Tissue Sarcomas* is part of Rosen Publishing's "Cancer and Modern Science" series for young adults. The book is designed to provide students (grades 7-12), parents, teachers, and healthcare providers with a lay-language, highly readable overview of soft tissue sarcomas. With a better understanding of the cancer, Newman and the publishers hope it will be easier for patients and their loved ones to first deal, and then ultimately, successfully live, with the disease. This book starts by explaining what soft tissues are, how cancer can develop in them, and why they occur. It then describes how soft-tissue sarcomas are diagnosed and treated. Finally, it takes a look at some of the state-of-the-art therapies being explored to keep improving a patient's chance of survival and quality of life. ■ Contact Newman at newmanbunch@comcast.net. Book publicist is Kathy Kuhtz Campbell at kathyc@rosenpub.com and 212-777-3017.

Quantum Theory
by Phillip Manning
(NASW), published by
Chelsea House



Manning, a freelance writer in Chapel Hill, N.C., describes quantum theory as the most stunningly successful and important scientific development of the last 300 years. It introduced a new world in which the certainties of the old physics were swept away. A mathematical theory originally introduced by Max Planck in 1900, quantum theory is based on the idea that energy can be changed only in certain discrete amounts for a given system. This world was explored by the giants of 20th-century science: Albert Einstein, Werner Heisenberg, Richard Feynman, and others. Study of quantum theory gave an uncannily accurate picture of this world. It also gave us many of the staples of modern life, such as lasers, atomic bombs, nuclear power plants, transistors, and computers—all of which owe their existence to mankind's knowledge of the quantum theory. Manning's book explains quantum theory and its everyday uses. Manning has a Ph.D. in physical chemistry from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He is the author of four other books and more than 150 magazine and newspaper articles. ■ Contact him at pvmanning@mindspring.com and 919-933-3908. Book's website is <http://bit.ly/r59TnX>.

Tucson Festival of Books

by Jim Cornell

Brick-and-mortar stores are crumbling. Borders is bankrupt. Readers are eschewing paper for iPads. And, yet, defying all logic, book festivals have become some of America's hottest public events.

As NPR's "Marketplace" reported in April, "nearly 200,000 people descended on Decatur, Ga. for a book festival...a half a million went to the Miami Book Fair...[and] 150,000 are expected to turn out for the L.A. Times Festival of Books..."

While the impact of book festivals on actual book sales is questionable, no one can question their popularity—or ubiquity. Found nationwide (check out www.bookfestivals.com); new ones are appearing annually.

Case in point is the Tucson Festival of Books (TFOB), held annually on the University of Arizona's campus. Conceived and organized, in 2009, by a group of local book lovers, including librarians, journalists, authors, and private citizens concerned with promoting literacy, TFOB (www.tucsonfestivalofbooks.org)



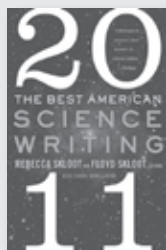
has quickly become one of the largest book festival in the country, with 450 authors, 250 vendors, and more than 100,000 attendees.

The point here is to encourage you to consider Tucson as a venue for touting your latest book. Lots of NASW members have already been involved in making TFOB a success in the past, including Deb Blum, Eric Eaton, Becky Ham, Doug Isbell, and Arlene Weintraub. Daniel Stolte of the University of Arizona's press office and yours truly are on the science book committee and we've put together a couple of panels for next spring; one of which—"Cold Crime, Hard Science: Forensic Non-fiction"—will feature NASW members Blum, Doug Starr, and Holly Tucker.

It's a bit late to get on board for the TFOB2012 (March 10 and 11), but, if you have a hot volume scheduled for release around then, perhaps a last-minute entry can be arranged. And, if you have a work in the works for later than that, contact me by next spring for possible inclusion in TFOB2013. ■

Jim Cornell is president of the International Science Writers Association. Contact him at cornelljc@earthlink.net or 520-529-6835.

The Best American Science Writing 2011
by Rebecca Skloot
and Floyd Skloot
(editors) published
by Ecco/Harper



The latest edition of this annual series, *The Best American Science Writing 2011* offers a collection of the year's most relevant and compelling science writing. This year's guest editors, award-winning science writer and *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* Rebecca Skloot and her father Floyd Skloot, an award-winning, non-fiction writer, poet, and past contributor to the series, have brought together a wide variety of works, providing a comprehensive overview of diverse and stimulating science writing. NASW members whose work is included in the anthology: Deborah Blum "The Trouble With Scientists" (from her blog *Speakeasy Science*); Amy Harmon "A Soft Spot for Circuitry" (published in the *New York Times*); and Carl Zimmer "The Singularity" (published in *Playboy*).

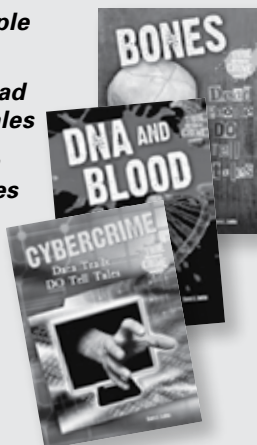
NOTE: Ecco/Harper seeks submissions for *The Best American Science Writing 2012*. Send work, published in 2011, electronically to series editor Jesse Cohen at jesse.cohen5@verizon.net. Include a brief cover letter. Deadline: Dec. 31, 2011.

Bones: Dead People DO Tell Tales

DNA & Blood: Dead People DO Tell Tales

Cybercrime: Data Trails DO Tell Tales

by Sara Latta
(NASW)
published by
Enslow



Renowned forensic anthropologist Clyde Snow works with Argentine scientists to identify victims of "The Dirty War;" a conservation biologist uses DNA to trace the origins of illegal ivory shipments; and FBI agents bust a sophisticated international computer hacking ring in a two-year investigation called Operation Phish Phry. These are just a few of the true-crime cases author Sara Latta describes in her books for middle-grade readers, part of the *True Forensic Crime Stories* series. Latta couples the origins of forensic science as it applies to each book with contemporary true-crime tales. Sure to please young CSI fans, these stories are the perfect way to learn about forensic science and the techniques and tools scientists use to solve crimes. ■ Latta may be contacted at saralatta@sbcglobal.net or through her website www.saralatta.com. The book's publicist is Alexander Lindroth at alexander@enslow.com. For orders, see www.enslow.com, or email orders@enslow.com.



NASW President
Nancy Shute
 Freelance
 NANCY@NANCYSHUTE.COM

President's Letter

THE LAST YEAR WAS A BIG ONE FOR NASW.

HERE'S AN UPDATE ON OUR EFFORTS ON BEHALF OF NASW MEMBERS, AND ALL SCIENCE WRITERS.

Some 725 people attended WCSJ2011 in Doha, Qatar, at the end of June. NASW was co-organizer of the event with the Arab Science Journalists Association, and NASW members volunteered countless hours over the past three years to make the conference happen. Former NASW president and program chair Deborah Blum put together a stellar program with hundreds of science journalists, PIOs, and professors from around the world. It was the first WCSJ meeting in which the majority of the attendees were from developing-world countries. Many NASW members volunteered as session organizers, speakers, and committee members. NASW also funded travel fellowships for members and speakers.

As someone who was fortunate enough to attend, I can say it was an exhilarating experience. I was inspired by the efforts of science journalists to hew to the highest standards of our craft in difficult and dangerous situations. We're now thinking how to continue NASW's collaboration with science writers in other countries, especially in Latin America. I welcome your thoughts on the direction of future international outreach.

At the same time, NASW's many domestic efforts keep cruising along, bigger and better thanks to the efforts of volunteer members. In February, NASW's longstanding mentoring program at the AAAS meeting in Washington, D.C., was the most successful ever, with 41 mentor pairings. The NASW internship fair also posted a new record, with 25 recruiters in attendance and more than 60 students.

NASW's finance committee has been hard at work to ensure that NASW is on a solid financial footing. It delivered a balanced budget for fiscal 2012, and is now investigating financial reserves, rainy-day funds, and other options to keep NASW solvent in the future. Stalwart volunteers Rick Bogren, Mari Jensen, and Ron Winslow also review all significant expenditures by the group, to make sure your money is being spent wisely.

The Internet committee experimented with hiring a part-time web editor to make sure the redesigned NASW website is updated frequently, with new and social media links. That experiment has been such a success that the committee has decided to continue the post for another year, with NASW cybrarian Russ Clemings taking on the task. The committee also is planning paid guest

editorships to harness the creativity and special interests of NASW members. Stay tuned for information on how to apply for guest editor gigs.

We've also been active in advocacy for the free flow of science information. NASW joined with the Society of Environmental Journalists in polling members on issues facing science journalists in gaining access to government data and sources. The effort was organized by NASW member Curtis Brainard of *Columbia Journalism Review*. NASW will have access to the data for future research and advocacy efforts. In addition, NASW sent letters to HHS Secretary Kathleen Sibelius and White House Science Policy Advisor John Holdren urging freer access to HHS scientists. Neither has replied, and the NASW board is considering other options on the issue, including collaborating with other journalism groups.

In November 2010 the NASW board built a strategic plan, assessing NASW's strengths and weaknesses and creating a blueprint for a sustainable future for the world's largest science writers' organization. One significant development was the creation of a program committee, charged with coordinating NASW's many efforts to make sure they offer the most possible benefit for members. The biggest new benefit is the "Big Ideas" grants program, funded by Authors Coalition money. The funds are intended to help science writers in their professional lives and benefit the field of science writing.

Grants included \$900 to Northeast Science Writers to fund video archive costs for a regional health and science blogging event; \$2,500 to *High Country News* to fund in-depth training in investigative reporting techniques for the publication's editors; \$6,000 to D.C. Science Writers to fund travel expenses and A/V support for its professional development day; \$20,000 to the Open Notebook to fund expansion of this online project on science journalism, created by NASW members Siri Carpenter and Jeanne Erdmann; \$43,000 to members Kendall Powell and Thomas Hayden, to fund writing and editing of a guide to freelance writing; and \$10,000 to members Terry Devitt, Sharon Dunwoody, Deborah Blum, and Jill Sakai to hold a national workshop on science writing in the age of denial in Madison, Wis. I'm hugely grateful to program committee chair Robin Lloyd and members Melissa Blouin, Peggy Girshman, Rob Irion, Rosie Mestel, and Jeffrey Perkel for making the Big Ideas program a success right out of the gate. More money's available; what's your big idea?

More good stuff is on the way. NASW's workshop committee, led by NASW vice president Peggy Girshman, considered almost 100 session proposals from NASW members, and has crafted a terrific program for NASW's professional development workshops, which will be held Oct. 15, in Flagstaff, Ariz. That's our joint annual meeting with CASW, which hosts its New Horizons in Science briefings immediately following the NASW workshops.

I'm looking forward to seeing you in Flagstaff, and launching another terrific year for NASW and science writers. ■



Cybrarian
Russell Clemings
CYBRARIAN@NASW.ORG

Cyberbeat

THE MOST RECENT REDESIGN OF THE NASW WEBSITE (NASW.ORG) IS FAST APPROACHING ITS FIRST BIRTHDAY. AND ALTHOUGH WE'RE STILL WORKING ON SOME OF ITS FEATURES—SUCH AS GETTING OUR EMAIL DISCUSSION LISTS TO PLAY NICELY WITH THE SITE—WE'VE COLLECTED ENOUGH FEEDBACK TO START A "FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS" LIST.

Here, then, are answers to some of the most common queries posed by the site's users, starting with one that came in just this morning:

Q: *How do I change my NASW.org email alias?*

A: Members can create email aliases in the form name@nasw.org by logging into the site, then following the "edit profile" link at the top of every page. From there, select the "additional information" link and scroll to the bottom of that page for the "NASW.org email alias" section.

Q: *Why do I see "Restricted content" when I try to view pages that I've visited before?*

A: There are several possible reasons. First, you may not be logged in; if so, you won't be able to see any page that is restricted to NASW members or registered guests. Second, there are some pages you cannot view even if logged in, such as another user's "edit profile" page. Finally, the page you are trying to view may be a previously "published" page that is now "unpublished." This can happen, for example, if a job advertiser asks us to hide an ad because the position in question has been filled.

Q: *Why am I not receiving email from NASW-Jobs?*

A: First, make sure we have a valid email address for you by logging in, using the "edit profile" link, and checking the "Primary email address" field. If you can't find a problem there, check the "subscriptions" link on the "notifications" tab. Make sure you see "NASW-Jobs, job advertisement," "email," and "active" listed there. If

A Greener Future for NASW

Dispatches

FROM THE Director



Tinsley Davis
Executive Director
DIRECTOR@NASW.ORG

Reducing Paper and Waste

Personally speaking, I love paper. I love the feel of it, the way the words sit on a page without flickering. I don't own an e-reader, though I read copious books (still twitching from Jonathan Cronin's dystopian *The Passage*). And my calendar requires an actual pen for entries. Administratively speaking, I hate paper. Paper documents multiply to take up space like tribbles.

When I began working for NASW in 2007, I knew that, like many non-profits, part of taking NASW into the future entailed making us greener. I began tracking areas where paper and snail mail were used, to try and determine where we could save paper (and thus printing and mailing costs). Here's an estimate of what we've saved thus far:

- Online Election Proxies
2,200 pages every other year or 1,100 pages/yr
- Dues Renewal Notices and Payment
2,200 members x 3 pages = 6,600 pages/yr
- Authors Coalition Surveys 2,200 pages/yr
- Electronic Invoices 250 pages/yr
- Online Membership Application
average submission 6 pages at 250/yr = 1,500 pages/yr
- Membership Directory*
2,200 members x 62 pages = 136,400 pages/yr

Total Saved: 148,050 sheets of paper per year

Online entry system unveiled for Science in Society Awards!

Entry details on page 30

In stamps alone, that saves \$4,400 annually. In 2012, we will save another 10,000 pages with the advent of the new online Science in Society Award system. (200 entries at 5 pages each x 10 copies = 10,000 pages/yr). What once required 10 copies of the entry form and piece will now be uploaded online.

There will always be a need for paper in the management of NASW—the IRS alone makes sure of that—but those documents that we do print and distribute, like *ScienceWriters*, are printed on as much recycled content as is feasible. With the exception of some mailings that the corporate bylaws of the State of New York mandate be sent to you, members can opt out (currently 264 of our 2,501 members do), but I won't. Seeing the words of NASWers in print in *ScienceWriters* is a quarterly highlight for me and one that I can easily pass on to budding science writers and potential members. ■

*As of 2010, print directory no longer mailed to the membership, but available as print-on-demand.

not, use the “Overview” link, followed by “add subscription,” to sign up for notifications. If that doesn’t solve the problem, drop a note to cybrarian@nasw.org.

Q: *How do I add/remove myself from the public “find a writer” page?*

A: Use the “edit profile” and “additional information” links. Scroll down to the “Primary website” field. If you list your website there, your name, city, country, specialty, expertise, and primary website address will appear on the “find a writer” page. If you leave that field blank, you will not appear on that page.

We’ll add some more things to this FAQ list later. Now, a sampling of recent list discussions:

NASW-TALK

Mary Beckham called attention in late July to a *Nature* story by fellow NASW member Eugenie Samuel Reich about the latest sad twist in her battle for an Energy Department report under the Freedom of Information Act. A judge ruled that a “report is not a government record releasable under the Freedom of Information Act—primarily because government officials have never read it.”

A deeply disturbing decision, others agreed.

“Yes, that was a bizarre concept,” New Jersey freelancer Don Monroe wrote. “If you don’t read it, it never existed.”

Reich filled in some of the details and noted that the judge had reinstated her lawsuit for the time being.

“The case depends on the ample precedent that whether or not something is a government record subject to FOIA depends on four factors, the most important of which is whether it has been ‘read or relied upon’ for official business,” she wrote. She also noted hopefully that the judge had reinstated her case.

One month later she wrote back to say that the District Court had ruled against her and she had 60 days to appeal.

“I believe this means the government can get out of the FOIA (with respect to a large category of documents originating with contractors, including those running the U.S. national labs) by filing declarations from the responsible officials stating they didn’t read the records, even if it was their job and government policy to read them,” she wrote.

To be continued.

For more, search the NASW-Talk archives for the thread “New tactic for organizations to avoid FOIAs.”

NASW-PR

Steve Tally of Purdue University posed the following question in early August:

“‘Who bears the responsibilities for public perceptions of science?’ That’s the topic of a panel I’ve been asked to join this fall at a conference for chemists.”

Some commenters felt that scientists themselves must be more aggressive in their public outreach, even if they’d rather be doing, well, science.

“You have a police officer come in to school and tell you what it’s like to do his or her job, and all the kids relate. They want to be police officers. How often did you have a plant geneticist come into school? Where were the engineers?” wrote Brian Wallheimer, also of Purdue.

Science communication guru Earle Holland of Ohio State University begged to differ.

“Stop for a moment and consider a slightly altered form of the question: Are cops responsible for the public perception of law enforcement? Are doctors responsible for the public perception of medicine? Are economists responsible for the public perception of the economy?” Holland wrote. “We in science have a responsibility to be receptive to at least semi-intelligent inquiries and respond accordingly. But the idea of scientists suddenly being burdened with the role of evangelists just seems terribly unfair to me, and also extremely unrealistic given the diminishing amount of available time left for actually doing science.”

For more, search the NASW-PR archives for the thread “Who is responsible for public perception of science?” ■



Genevive Bjorn
Freelance
GENEVIVE@NASW.ORG

The Free Lance

From Freelance Journalist to Digital Entrepreneur

THE DIGITAL MEDIA AGE SERVES UP UNCERTAINTY AS WELL AS OPPORTUNITY. ONE SOLUTION TO THE ANEMIC JOB POOL FOR SCIENCE WRITERS IS TO GROW BEYOND JOURNALISM INTO ENTREPRENEURSHIP, SPECIFICALLY INTO DIGITAL PUBLISHING. Training for this kind of career growth is exactly what the Knight Digital Media Center offers in its intensive, weeklong workshop called Independent Journalist. I am the first member of NASW to graduate from this workshop in March 2011, and I was a fellow in the second-ever class. [Applications for the third annual workshop will be available online in the fall. For more information visit <http://multimedia.journalism.berkeley.edu/workshops/independent>.]

This workshop was created in direct response to the emerging news and information landscape, where specialty blogs and hyper local community news sites fulfill an important role. Most participants in the workshop design their sites around a specific place, and some alumni have achieved stunning success quickly, including the founders of the VoiceofSanDiego.org. In my class, I was the only participant to undertake designing a news site around a science topic, specifically, covering the five senses, based on my blog about the sense of smell (TheDailySmell.com). Turns out that science journalists are uniquely qualified to create topical communities online because we tend to gravitate toward stories based on data.

“Science is filled with data that can be illustrated with visual elements that really make stories come alive, and the Independent Journalist workshop gives the fellows a better understanding of how to do it, whether it’s for community news

GENEVIVE BJORN IS A FREELANCE SCIENCE JOURNALIST AND DIGITAL ENTREPRENEUR BASED IN SAN DIEGO, CALIF.

or topical science news,” says Lanita Pace-Hinton, director of multimedia and technology programs at the Knight Digital Media Center, located on the campus of the UC Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism.

ENGAGING A COMMUNITY

The starting point for digital entrepreneurship is engagement. Specifically, this means connecting actively with an audience through a well-designed website and social media tools. Engagement builds audience and lays the foundation for making money. Every independent journalist needs an engagement strategy, which is separate from a business strategy. Both are vital to the success of a digital venture. The Indie Journalist workshop walks participants through the data around engagement and helps the fellows learn how to think strategically.

The first step to engagement is building a news site that functions well and meets both content and business needs. The Indie Journalist workshop teaches fellows the basics of content management using the free Wordpress.org platform. By the end of the week, I built an entirely new site for my existing topical blog that serves up what appears to be ever-changing content in a clean and professional layout, and I continue to use the skills I gained to design and build other sites. I made more progress learning Wordpress.org in one day at the workshop than I did in the previous six months using independent tutorials.

The next step in creating engagement is to slip into the stream of social media. For example, a recent study by National Public Radio showed that people like to read upbeat, quirky stories on Facebook. Further data about Facebook users, posted by social media scientist Dan Zarrella (www.DanZarrella.com), show that users share weekend posts more than weekday posts. So one part of an engagement strategy might include creating a Facebook page for the news site and then posting more conversational and leisurely pieces there on Saturday morning and Sunday evening, when Facebook receives 65 percent of its traffic.

By comparison, another survey by NPR revealed that Twitter users want breaking news, hard news, and events in progress. So another part of an engagement strategy might include tweeting public interest pieces related directly to the site’s concept toward the end of the business day when most of the Twitterati check in.

The Indie Journalist workshop devotes less time to business strategy because that is the subject of a different workshop on business leadership called Entrepreneur Boot Camp offered by KDMC in conjunction with the USC Annenberg School of Journalism. Still, the Indie Journalist workshop covers the basics of how to create, deploy, and manage advertising in a manner that enhances news gathering and content. Rainey Smith, an online advertising consultant who led a session on advertising, challenged the fellows to see the ads on our sites—whether they come from direct sales, an ad network, Google AdSense, or “house” service alerts—as an extension of the site’s content. Ads can generate much-needed revenue for the site, and when they are appealing to the audience and highly relevant, they become an important layer of an engagement strategy.

VISUAL STORYTELLING

The capstone project for the week was to create, shoot, edit, and post to our development site a multimedia story. For reporters like myself, who work primarily in print, the learning

curve was steep. I learned in a matter of days the basics of audio and video recording, on-camera interviewing, what makes for good b-roll, and how to pull it all together into a cohesive, engaging story using Final Cut Pro. The fellows pulled exhausting 12- to 14-hour days, and still the instructors had to coax us away from the computers and out of the editing room at 9 p.m. After day three, I felt like the student in the Far Side cartoon who raises his hand and asks to be excused because his brain is full.

Learning audio and video was just the beginning of telling a story with multimedia. The fellows’ projects also had to include an interactive element, such as a survey, a map, or a slideshow. I opted for a survey, which after answering a question about attitudes over global climate change, revealed the cumulative results and compared those results to national data. It was during this portion of the workshop that I became aware of the wide-range of digital skill levels among the fellows. Some were totally new to the digital world, while others had worked careers in TV or film. Most, like me were somewhere in between, not afraid of the digital world but not fluent either.

“This program is designed for print journalists to overcome inhibitions to new technology, and we take the fellows step-by-step through digital reporting and all of the aspects of how to create an online space and engage a community,” Pace-Hinton explained to me during a coffee break.

Each phase of the workshop got me thinking more deeply about all of the ways to engage online with people. There are so many more possibilities online than in print that referring to the audience as “readers” seems anachronistic. Near the end of the week over lunch conversation with a few fellows, I had an

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“ah-ha” moment: As an independent journalist, my customer is the advertiser and, when I successfully engage the reader, she becomes my collaborator.

The week wound down as the fellows presented their project to each other, received with cheers and applause for hard-won successes: her mash-up map loaded, his smartly-edited video rocked, and my survey resolved inside a blog post. The instructors smiled like proud parents, even as they continued to pass on as much helpful information as time would allow, covering Photoshop basics, blogging, search engine optimization, and Google analytics. Somehow, most of the lessons stuck. I credit the teaching prowess and technical mastery of the workshop's faculty: Jerry Monti, Scot Hacker, Len De Groot, and Richard Koci-Hernandez. One of the fellows described the workshop as “the best and most relevant career training” he's ever received.

THE HARD PART

Now that the workshop is over, the real work has begun. It takes months or more to develop, test, and launch an online news community. I am in the process of developing two new sites, one about the five senses and the other documenting modern Hawaiian culture. I have partnered with another fellow for the Hawaiian project. Further, I hope to take the leadership course at USC Annenberg next year to further hone the business model for each site.

Many of the fellows used the training they received to improve existing sites. For example, Anne-Marie Adams revamped *TheHartfordGuardian.com* to include map and statistical mash-ups, while Charlotte Jacqueline added moving slideshows to her site, *TheBuffaloStoryProject.com*. Another fellow, Patricio Espinoza, made it easier for collaborators to upload photos and video to *TheAlamoCityTimes.com*, making the site's content almost entirely user-generated. Maria Zamudio launched her new site about undocumented immigrants at *UndocumentedLife.com*. Michelle Fitzhugh-Craig, publishers of *Shades* magazine (*MyShadesMagazine.net*), added more relevant advertising to her site, including “house” ads for similar sites run by Indie Journalist fellows, and she ran a story one of the fellows pitched her at the workshop.

All fellows in the Indie Journalist workshop and similar programs offered by KDMC must commit, over the course of a year, to purchase approximately \$2,000 in digital media equipment, such as a digital camera, editing software, and an external microphone. It's a sizeable investment, especially for a freelancer, but one that may be offset with tax benefits. I was able to meet the requirement through NASW's career grant program. The career grant also covered my transportation costs to and from the workshop. KDMC covers all of the other costs associated with the workshop, including tuition, lodging, and meals for six days, as well as ongoing follow-up and web-based support.

“We want you to succeed, and we are always looking for more ways to make that happen,” said Pace-Hinton.

Whatever lessons from the workshop didn't stick in mind are available online in the free tutorial archive (<http://multimedia.journalism.berkeley.edu/tutorials>). Or else, I can ping for help any one of the instructors or Indie Journalist alumni, who, like me, have acquired through this workshop a basic repertoire of digital and entrepreneurial skills that empowers us to transform our ideas into opportunity. ■



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Our Gang

Alex “Sandy” Antunes has left full-time science/proposal freelance writing for the only thing that could ever lure him away—a full-time assistant professorship in astronautical engineering at Capitol College, in Laurel, Md. He will continue toward the launch of his personal Project Calliope picosatellite in 2012 with a four e-book series due over the next year from O'Reilly Media. Find out how the satellite will “listen” to the ionosphere at sandy.antunes@gmail.com.

Lisa Bain left The Wistar Institute and returned to freelance full time, focusing on Alzheimer's disease, neuroscience, immunology...and whatever else comes her way. Wish her well at lbain@nasw.org.

Matt Bille has been named to the Panel on Organizations for the DARPA 100-Year Starship Study Public Symposium, which will examine the technological, organizational, and philosophical challenges of creating a spacefaring civilization over the long term. Write him at MattWriter@aol.com to reserve a ticket on the first space saucer out.

University of Pittsburgh Medical Center writer/editor **Kenneth Chiacchia** is enjoying his first year at a new freelance gig—as a commentator for the *Allegheny Front*, Essential Public Radio's environmental news program. His work just won a Golden Quill Award for best writing, radio, from the Press Club of Western Pennsylvania. Send an “attaboy” to chiacchiakb@upmc.edu.

Suzanne Clancy joins the molecular medicine division of Life Technologies as senior manager of public relations for regulated markets. The San Diego-based company is a developer of life science tools, diagnostics, and next-generation genome sequencing systems. Congratulate her at suzanne.clancy@lifetech.com.

Julie Corliss left her position as a senior medical editor at Harvard Health Publications and relocated to Washington, D.C., where she is now freelancing and looking for a full-time job. Send leads to julie.corliss@gmail.com.

Jennie Dusheck just completed an assignment for W.W. Norton writing or revising 36 chapter-opening stories for the fifth edition of the publisher's college textbook *Discover Biology*. Acknowledge the accomplishment at dusheck@cruzio.com.

Bob Finn is moving on after 10 years with the International Medical News Group, first as San Francisco bureau chief and then as social media and web content editor. He'll be the assistant managing editor at *Medscape Medical News*, where, among other things, he'll work with freelancers, assigning and editing stories based on medical journal articles. Best of all, he says, “I get to continue working out of my home, which I've been doing for the last 19 years.” Write to him at finn@nasw.org.

The newest addition to the *Scientific American* family of blogs is **Jennifer Frazer's** *The Artful Amoeba*—which chronicles “the

weird wonderfulness of life on Earth.” Frazer, a newly minted full-time freelancer, will soon see her first freelance story appear in *High Country News*, and she also hints that a book proposal is in the works. Get the details at ranatrafusca@yahoo.com.

Robert Frederick left *Science* magazine and Washington, to freelance in North Carolina, where his spouse is an English professor. As multimedia reporter/producer for the magazine and host/interviewer for the weekly *Science* podcast, Rob covered all scientific disciplines. Now, he says, “I’m thinking it’s time to specialize. My graduate work is in applied math, so probably something along those lines—as I really like the physical sciences—but most of my freelance work thus far has been about biological sciences, which I also enjoy. Happy for any advice!” Send him your thoughts at RobertFrederick@nasw.org.

Lynne Friedmann and **Lisa Song** were picked as journalism fellows by the Metcalf Institute for Marine and Environmental Reporting at the University of Rhode Island. In July, they attended a marine science seminar for ethnic news media. Song, based in Chelmsford, Mass., is a reporter at *SolveClimate News*, focusing on issues related to water and ocean science. Friedmann, based in Solana Beach, Calif., is a freelance science writer and editor who writes about science, health, and environmental concerns facing coastal communities along the U.S.–Mexico border of San Diego County. Song can be reached at lisa.song21@gmail.com; Friedmann at lfriedmann@nasw.org.

As of August 1, **Anne Holden** joined the growing communications team at the Gladstone Institutes, in San Francisco. Gladstone is an independent, non-profit research institution

affiliated with the University of California-San Francisco focusing on cardiovascular disease, neurological disease, and immunology/virology. Her title is communications associate. Say hello at adholden@gmail.com.

In a small step for NASA but a giant step for **Aries Keck**, she’s joined NASA Goddard Space Flight Center as a writer for *Earth Science*. She’ll back communications for three upcoming satellite launches: NPP, GPM, and Landsat 8. Ask her to explain the acronyms at aries.keck@gmail.com.

In August, **Melissa Lutz Blouin** was promoted to senior director of academic communications at the University of Arkansas. In addition to supervising the science and research communications unit, she also is now responsible for leading the efforts of the communications directors in individual colleges to create a cohesive academic communications strategy for the university. Congratulate her at blouin@uark.edu.

The National Evolutionary Synthesis Center selected **Mike Martin** as a 2011 Journalist in Residence fellow. The program offers reporters, producers, and editors the opportunity to work on an evolution-focused project of their choosing. Martin will explore recent cancer research that may lend support to the ideas of Margie Profet, an innovative evolutionary biologist who vanished without a trace in 2005. Get the scoop at mjmartin@weeklyscentist.com.

Laura Petersen, a reporter for Washington-based Environment and Energy Publishing—publisher of *Greenwire*, *ClimateWire*, *Environment & Energy Daily*, and *E&E News PM*—was recently in Hawaii as a National Tropical Botanical Garden Environmental Journalism Fellow. She spent a week on the island of Kauai immersed in the science and environmental issues of tropical ecosystems and ecology. Give Laura an “aloha!” at lpetersen@eenews.net.

The American Geophysical Union (AGU) has honored **Charlie Petit** with its 2011 Robert C. Cowen Award for Sustained Achievement in Science Journalism. The award recognizes “significant, lasting, and consistent contributions to accurate reporting or writing” on earth and space science for the general public. The AGU cited the “outstanding quality of Petit’s work...in articles written throughout his career,” adding that, over the last four decades, his work has demonstrated a “remarkable blend of accessibility, accuracy, and excellence.” Congratulate Petit at petit@nasw.org.

Bob Roehr is excited about receiving a National Press Foundation fellowship to the J2J program and AIDS Vaccine Conference, in Bangkok. As a first-time traveler to Asia, he is taking some time to see the local sights as well. Write to him at BobRoehr@aol.com.

Three members won APEX awards for their work in *Oncology Times*: **Daniel Keller**, **Eric Rosenthal**, and **Rabiya Tuma**. Keller and Rosenthal won the 2011 News Series Writing Award for Publication Excellence for their five-part *Oncology Times* series, “Proton Beam Radiation Therapy: Implications for Cancer.” Earlier this year the series also received a bronze award for Best Feature Article Series from the American Society of Healthcare Publication Editors. And, Tuma won the 2011 News Writing Award for her article “Duke Scandal Sheds Light on Systemic Problems in High-Throughput Experiments.” Reach them at dkeller@nasw.org, etrosenthal@verizon.net, and rabiya@nasw.org.

Kate Ramsayer has joined the American Geophysical

UPCOMING MEETINGS

January 10-13, 2012 • Science, Society and Sustainability, Lady Doak College, Madurai, India. ldcinc2012@yahoo.com

February 16-20, 2012 • AAAS Annual Meeting, Vancouver, BC, Canada. www.aaas.org/meetings/future_mtgs/

April 18-20, 2012 • Public Communication of Science & Technology (PCST) Biennial Conference, Florence, Italy. www.pcst2012.org/

July 1-6, 2012 • 62nd Meeting of Nobel Laureates (dedicated to physics), Lindau, Germany. info@lindau-nobel.org

July 12-16, 2012 • 5th Euroscience Open Forum (ESOF2012), Dublin, Ireland. www.esof2012.org [media scholarships available; go to www.bosch-stiftung.de/esof-fellowship, AFTER JAN. 1, for details]

September 3-6, 2012 • Kavli Prize Science Forum, Oslo, Norway. [media scholarships available; go to www.wfsj.org and click on “competitions”]

September 4-9, 2012 • British Science Festival, Aberdeen, Scotland. www.britishtscienceassociation.org

Union as a public information specialist writer. She comes from *The Bulletin* newspaper, in Bend, Ore., where she was the environment and natural resources reporter, covering topics such as geothermal energy, climate change, water rights, and ecology. Send a welcome note to kramsayer@agu.org.

Richard Robinson recently authored a review of Parkinson's disease that appeared as a supplement to *U.S. Medicine*. He's also branched out a bit from his usual neurology beat to cover medical news for *Renal Week*. (He adds, "Thanks for the connection, Cathy Dold!") Last, the third edition of his textbook of phlebology is due out soon. Write to him at rrobinson@nasw.org.

Kendra Snyder has left Brookhaven National Lab to become a science publicist at the American Museum of Natural History. She describes her five years at Brookhaven as wonderful, but she's always loved the museum and now will have time to fully explore it. "I'm also looking forward to meeting the museum's curators, and telling others about the great research they do around the world," she says. "Besides all of that, who wouldn't want to work among dinos?" Send best wishes to kendrasnyder@gmail.com.

Freelancer **Diana Steele** is spending the rest of 2011 at Ohio State University's Mathematical Biosciences Institute. There she will cover international research that applies mathematical, statistical, and computational methods to resolve significant problems in the biosciences. Tell her "Go Bucks!" at dsteeler@nasw.org.

After four years as director of media relations for the National Institute of Standards and Technology in Gaithersburg, Md., **Ben Stein** has returned to the American Institute of Physics in College Park, Md., as editorial manager of *Inside Science*, a news service providing science content for broad audiences. In addition to leading and developing *Inside Science*, he will be writing and editing for the news service. He'd be delighted to hear from other members at bstein@aip.org.

The *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* must be treating freelancer **Dawn Stover** right. After filling in at the publication over the summer, she's accepted a regular gig as a contributing editor and columnist. She'll cover nuclear energy and climate change. Find out more at dstover@hughes.net.

Jennifer Wettlaufer claimed two state-level, first-place journalism awards from the National Federation of Press Women for pieces in *Buffalo Spree* magazine. Her winning entry in the education category featured a magnet school in the city of Buffalo, and UB architecture students' full-scale urban dwelling art installment. Her other winning entry featured her green column and went on to an honorable mention in the national competition. Write to her at buffalolink@earthlink.net.

In June, **Sylvia Wright** moved from her former position—senior PIO for environmental science at the University of California, Davis—to a new role as the first senior director of communications for the UC Davis Institute of Transportation Studies and the Energy Efficiency Center. She's looking forward to a major redesign of the institute's website this fall. Wish her well at swright@ucdavis.edu. ■

■ ■ ■

Our Gang seeks career news updates—whether you are a staff writer, freelance, broadcaster, blogger, editor, educator, student, or hybrid. email Pam Frost Gorder at gorder.1@osu.edu



Suzanne Clancy
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Regional Groups

NEW ENGLAND

Assessing fish populations has always been an inexact science, and controversy swirls around whether or not certain fish stocks are being overfished. About 30 science writers and environmental journalists met June 18 at the New Bedford Whaling Museum to hear about new fish-counting technologies from marine biologist Kevin Stokesbury from the School for Marine Science & Technology at University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, and Hanuman Singh of the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution. Bottom line? Buy and eat fish from the U.S. and Canada, which regulate fisheries for sustainable stocks. Nosh on scallops, lobsters, and haddock with a clear conscience. The event was organized by Ann Parsons and moderated by Heather Goldstone, blogger at Climatide (climatide.wgbh.org).

At the summer social on Aug. 17, more than 50 people packed the bar and tables at Trata, a cozy restaurant in Cambridge discovered by event organizer Richard Saltus. Popular topics of conversation included new jobs, healthy freelance economy, exotic travels, and the miracle of finding nearby parking spots in Harvard Square (before the students arrive).

With more than 2,400 views so far, the video from January's health and science journalism blogging panel at the Harvard Faculty Club is becoming a cult classic. Check it out at neswonline.com/2011/03/14/journalist-bloggers.

NEW YORK

Science Writers in New York (SWINY) held an evening of networking/socializing/fun on June 13 at Windfall Bar and Restaurant. Members had the chance to chat with other writers, editors, and PIOs, reconnect with colleagues, and meet new ones.

The group also experienced a few board changes. Dave Mosher is the newest member of the SWINY board of directors. Dave is a contributor to *Wired.com* and a freelance science journalist based in Queens. Several long-time board members have assumed new responsibilities: Sheila Haas has taken over the duties of treasurer, while Alan Brown and Beth Schachter will share responsibilities as secretary.

SWINY co-chair Joe Bonner is one of the organizers of SoNYC (Science Online NYC), a monthly discussion series in NYC for anyone interested in how science is carried out and communicated online. The meetings are held at Rockefeller University, where Bonner is director of communications and public affairs. SoNYC is a *nature.com* project organized by Lou Woodley of *Nature* in collaboration with John Timmer of *Ars Technica* and Jeanne Garbarino and Bonner. The meeting topics have ranged from "Are Scientists Anti-social?" to "Science and the Law."



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NORTH CAROLINA

In June, Science Communicators of North Carolina (SCONC) members and their families met up for minor league baseball to watch the Durham Bulls take on the Buffalo Bison. The group reports that the game offered a nice opportunity to connect while crushing peanuts.

In early August, SCONC was back to business and invited the author of *The Wild Life of Our Bodies*, Rob Dunn, to join us for a SCONC Salon at the Burroughs Wellcome Fund. Dunn discussed his writing process and read from his book; the event will be broadcast on the new SCONC podcast series. The first SCONC podcast is a panel discussion with authors DeLene Beeland, Scott Huler, and Glenn Murphy that was recorded during the North Carolina Science Festival.

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

Of Not-So-Close Encounters: At a summer dinner meeting, NCSWAs heard from Seth Shostak, senior astronomer at SETI—the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence. Shostak walked the group through the odds that intelligent beings exist elsewhere in the universe—odds that are not necessarily universally accepted. He described the SETI team's on-going project to scan the sky for radio-wave signals that, like our own broadcast waves, stream unimpeded across space. Since other civilizations may have hit upon radio wave transmission technology a few million years ago, it's likely that their signals have travelled a lot farther than ours. So, Shostak concluded, it's way smarter for us to listen for them than to pin our hopes on aliens picking up ours. He also shared clips from his radio program, *Big Picture Science*, co-hosted with Molly Bentley, exploring extraterrestrial life searches and other ambitious-scale investigations.

Don't try this at home: At NCSWA's spring dinner meeting, some of the group heard for the first time about an effort to reverse engineer the brain's neural circuits in silicon—this, to better understand how the brain works. Kwabena Boahen, professor of bioengineering at Stanford University, described progress in his lab and others to build computers that can emulate the brain's power efficiency—a task that will mean forsaking most of what we've learned about building computers. He reported that his team has already built silicon versions of retina, cortex, hippocampus, and other neural tissues that are up to 1,000 times more power-efficient than a digital computer would be doing the same task. It's all about “neomorphic electronics.” Try dropping that one at the next party.

Earlier in the year, nature-loving NCSWAs hiked through talus cave and weird, twisted terrain of Pinnacles National Monument, east of the Salinas Valley, accompanied by rangers who explained the park's geology, identified native plants, and shared binoculars to catch a good look at 20 condors riding a thermal updraft. The hike was led by NCSWA's Erik Vance, freelancer and rock climber extraordinaire. A month later, a NCSWA hike led to the “minor peaks” near San Francisco, following a loop trail that provided unique views of the city and visits to Tank Hill and Kite Hill, among other high points. A local pub served as a strategic site for a full post-hike review.

SEATTLE

The Northwest Science Writers Association (NSWA) hosted an eye-popping presentation on scientific animations and

interactive graphics on March 2, organized by board member Rebecca Hughes of Group Health Research Institute. As moderator and NSWA President Sally James put it, a picture is worth a thousand words, but the event “Picture Perfect: How Visuals Convey Ideas About Science” showed us that's nothing compared to a picture that moves. Beth Anderson and Doug Huff of the Seattle animation firm Arkitek (www.arkitek.com) showed a highlight reel of recent work, with pathogenic cells sailing through an airway, and RNA chomped into sections by processing enzymes. “We sell comprehension,” said Anderson. “We illustrate “things that are too small, too fast, or too slow to see.” Arkitek animators and science writers have a lot in common. Both groups need to reduce scientific complexity to the essential concepts, and Anderson and Huff said their three main challenges are getting scientists to focus on only the most important details of their project, creating a sense of scale, and making their work relevant to a broad audience. Sounds familiar.

So does the philosophy of interactive graphics, as stated by Ellie Fields of Tableau Software, headquartered in Seattle, who said, “It's all about storytelling.” Fields demonstrated the free online software Tableau Public (www.tableausoftware.com/products/public), transforming a dry spreadsheet of data into a color-coded U.S. map of obesity and diabetes incidence, zooming up to the national level and down to individual counties. The presentation was held at the Seattle Science Foundation, with an introduction by CEO Kurt Miner, who explained that the high-tech space is used to hold courses for a wide audience, “from fourth graders to doctors.” Presentation attendees were fortified by wine, beer, snacks, and conversation before the event, and had plenty of networking time afterwards. The Northwest chapter held a variety of other events in 2011 including:

- Walking tour of the geology of downtown building stones by naturalist David Williams, author of *Stories in Stone: Travels Through Urban Geology*. The sold-out 1.5-mile tour included a look at gneiss, some of the oldest stone on the planet, and many fossils in limestone.
- Visit to the Pacific Wildland Forest Fire Laboratory, in the Seattle neighborhood of Fremont, where scientists who specialize in smoke helped crews fighting the Los Alamos and New Mexico fires using computer models of smoke behavior.
- Co-presenting sessions on global health with the World Affairs Council of Seattle, and in a separate meeting, a session on integrative medicine with the City Club of Seattle.
- A panel discussion in April on how to use video to tell a science story (available online at tinyurl.com/NWSAVideo).

WASHINGTON, D.C.

DCSWA kicked off summer with a happy hour in June to welcome summer science-writing interns and to mingle with this year's AAAS Mass Media Fellows. DCSWAs also communed with nature that month during a walk through Mason Neck State Park, in northern Virginia. Although the park is known for its bald eagles, DCSWA members did not observe any of these birds, but saw plenty of great blue herons on their hike. Also in June, local geologist Callan Bentley of Northern Virginia Community College once again led a geology hike through Washington, D.C.'s Rock Creek Park, pointing out remnants of

REGIONAL GROUPS continued on page 33

2011 Rennie Taylor/Alton Blakeslee Fellows Announced

The Council for the Advancement of Science Writing (CASW) has announced the recipients of this year's Rennie Taylor/Alton Blakeslee Graduate Studies Fellowships. The fellowships provide up to \$5,000 for the academic year to both professional journalists and students of outstanding ability who have been accepted into graduate-level programs in science writing. The recipients are:

Garret Fitzpatrick, a graduate of the University of Wisconsin-Madison, who will be attending MIT.

Hannah Krakauer, a graduate of Stanford University, also attending MIT.

Trevor Quirk, a graduate of Sienna College (Latham, N.Y.), who will be attending Boston University.

Ashley P. Taylor, a graduate of Oberlin College and Harvard Extension School, who will be attending the New York University, SHERP (Science, Health, and Environmental Reporting Program).

Support for this year's fellowships comes from CASW and The Brinson Foundation (www.brinsonfoundation.org). The fellowships honor the memory of Rennie Taylor, a science writer for the Associated Press, whose estate provided funds for the establishment of the American Tentative Society (ATS), and Alton Blakeslee, AP science editor, who served as long-time president of ATS. Fellowship application and eligibility requirements can be found at www.casw.org. ■

ScienceWriters2011 NASW Travel Fellows Announced

NASW is pleased to offer over \$25,000 in travel fellowships this year to assist science writers with travel and registration costs for the Flagstaff meeting and extend its congratulations to the following recipients:

2011 Graduate Travel Fellowship Recipients

Carol Berkower, The Johns Hopkins University

John de Dios, University of Arizona, Tucson

Kim Derose, Annenberg School, USC

Amy Kraft, CUNY Graduate School of Journalism

Sarani Rangarajan, Iowa State University

Meghan Rosen, UC Santa Cruz

Amee Salois, University of Arkansas

Helen Shen, UC Santa Cruz

Paul Strong, University of Colorado - Boulder

Amy West, UC Santa Cruz

2011 Freelance Travel Fellowship Recipients

Jennifer Bails

Christine Hoekenga

Megan McKenzie

Zoe Corbyn

Amanda Mascarelli

Kathleen O'Neil

Boonsri Dickinson

Amy Mayer

Chris Palmer

Alison Fromme

2011 Changing Times Travel Fellowship Recipients

Rick Bogren

Stacy Kish

Kate Mosher

Jennifer Frazer

David Levine

Abby Robinson



Christine Peterson is the outdoor reporter for the Casper Star-Tribune.

Clark/Payne Award Honors Enterprising Young Reporter

The winner of the 2011 Evert Clark/Seth Payne Award, an annual prize for young science journalists, is Christine Peterson of the *Casper Star-Tribune* in Casper, Wy.

Peterson receives the award and its \$1,000 prize for a series, entitled "On Thinning Ice," on shrinking glaciers in Wyoming's Wind River Range.

The panel of judges cited Peterson for her enterprise in tromping around with scientists out in the field and in tracking down ranchers and other locals affected by the changing climate; for her ability to portray a range of scientific disciplines, along with the process of science itself, in an engaging way; and for taking a highly politicized topic, climate change, and depoliticizing it by focusing on indisputable changes that are already forcing people to adapt.

"Peterson's reporting nails down the fact that the melting of glaciers is having consequences that are relevant to the local community, showing that climate change isn't an abstract idea, but something concrete that affects lives," explained the judges.

The award will be presented by the Evert Clark Fund and the National Association of Science Writers, in conjunction with the National Press Foundation. The ceremony will take place on Saturday, Oct. 15, during the annual meeting of the National Association of Science Writers and the Council for the Advancement of Science Writing. This year's meeting will be held in Flagstaff, Ariz.

Judges for the 2011 award were Susan Milius, life sciences writer at *Science News*; Richard Kerr, senior writer at *Science*; Peggy Girshman, executive editor of *Kaiser Health News*; David Lindley, author of *Uncertainty: Einstein, Heisenberg, Bohr, and the Struggle for the Soul of Science* and other books about physics; and Dr. Jay Gulledge, senior scientist and director for science and impacts at the Pew Center on Global Climate Change.

The Clark/Payne Award encourages young science writers by recognizing outstanding reporting in all fields of science. It is given each year in memory of journalists Ev Clark and Seth Payne, who offered friendship and advice to a generation of young reporters. This is the 22nd year of the award.

All entrants must be age 30 or younger. The deadline for submissions is now the end of June each year. For more information, contact the Evert Clark Award Fund or the Evert Clark website (clark-payne.org). ■

(source: news release)

Request for Submissions

Honoring and encouraging outstanding investig



2012 Science in Society Journalism Awards

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Categories for 2012

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- Science Reporting
- Science Reporting for a Local or Regional Audience

Questions?

Contact NASW Executive Director Tinsley Davis
at director@nasw.org or (510) 647-9500

The Purpose

NASW established the Science in Society awards to provide recognition—without subsidy from any professional or commercial interest—for investigative or interpretive reporting about the sciences and their impact on society. NASW especially encourages entries of critical, probing pieces that would not receive an award from an interest group. Beginning with the first award in 1972, previous winners have demonstrated innovative reporting that goes well beyond the science itself and into the ethical problems and social implications. A committee of accomplished peers judges the entries each year.

The Awards

NASW will award separate cash prizes of \$2,500 for writing judged best in each of four categories: books, commentary or opinion, science reporting, and science reporting for a local or regional audience. All categories are platform independent. We're open to entries from print, broadcast, and online journalists. Winners and their publishers/broadcasters will also receive certificates. The 2012 awards will be presented at an awards dinner the weekend of October 27, 2012, in Research Triangle Park, North Carolina. Reasonable travel and hotel expenses of the award winners will be reimbursed. In cases of multiple authors or producers, only one person's expenses will be covered.

Active and interpretive reporting about the sciences and their impact on society

Eligibility

Any writer (or team) is eligible to submit one entry in each category. Except in the book category, an entry will consist of a maximum of three articles or broadcasts on separate topics or a single series. Work must be written or spoken in English, intended for the lay person, and first published or broadcast in North America between Jan. 1, 2011, and Dec. 31, 2011. Winners of last year's awards and individuals who have won three times are not eligible.

Rules for Submission

Only online entries will be accepted. ■ Detailed rules for submission, including handling of books and multimedia, can be found at nasw.org/scienceinsociety. Please follow the rules carefully. Submissions that do not follow these procedures will not be considered. ■ Entries must meet the purpose stated above. Material about significant advances in science, no matter how well written, will be ineligible if the relevance to the broader society is unclear. If you wish, you may include a cover letter of not more than one page explaining why the entry deserves to win the Science in Society Award. Any person, including the author, may submit material.

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Recent Winners

- 2011** **BOOK** Maryn McKenna, *Superbug: The Fatal Menace of MRSA* (Free Press) ■ **COMMENTARY OR OPINION** Charles Homans, "Hot Air" (*Columbia Journalism Review*) ■ **SCIENCE REPORTING** Katy Butler, "My Father's Broken Heart" (*New York Times Magazine*) ■ **SCIENCE REPORTING FOR A LOCAL OR REGIONAL AUDIENCE** Barbara Moran, "Power Politics" (*Boston Globe Magazine*)
- 2010** **BOOK** Susan Cohen and Christine Cosgrove, *Normal at Any Cost: Tall Girls, Short Boys, and the Medical Industry's Quest to Manipulate Height* (Tarcher/Penguin, 2009) ■ **SCIENCE REPORTING** Martha Mendoza and Margie Mason, "When Drugs Stop Working" (Associated Press, Dec. 26-31, 2009); Charles Duhigg, "Toxic Waters" (*The New York Times*, Aug. 22-Dec. 16, 2009) ■ **SCIENCE REPORTING WITH A LOCAL OR REGIONAL FOCUS** J. Madeleine Nash, "Bring in the Cows" (*High Country News*, May 25, 2009)
- 2009** **BOOK** Alison Bass, *Side Effects: A Prosecutor, a Whistleblower, and a Bestselling Antidepressant on Trial* (Algonquin, 2008); **Honorable Mention** Neil Shubin, *Your Inner Fish: A Journey into the 3.5-Billion-Year History of the Human Body* (Pantheon, 2008) ■ **SCIENCE REPORTING** Jason Felch and Maura Dolan, "DNA: Genes as Evidence" (*Los Angeles Times*, May-Dec., 2008); **Honorable Mention** Jeff Donn, Martha Mendoza, and Justin Pritchard, "PharmaWater" (Associated Press) ■ **SCIENCE REPORTING WITH A LOCAL OR REGIONAL FOCUS** Michael J. Berens and Ken Armstrong, "Culture of Resistance" (*Seattle Times*, Nov. 16-18, 2008)

For more details on past winners including some judges' comments visit nasw.org/awards

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*student member

DISRUPTIONS

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conference was moved after the February revolu-
tion in Egypt.)

But in May, Osama and other members of ASJA
raised concerns about Wexler's participation.
Egyptian and Jordanian press associations prohibit
members from conducting activities that constitute
"normalization" with Israel, a loosely interpreted
term that for reporters can mean not even inter-
viewing Israeli citizens. Some ASJA members felt
sharing a panel with Wexler—or attending a
conference at which she spoke—constituted
normalization. Others disagreed but felt pressured
by their press associations or employers to boycott
the meeting. ASJA rank and file as well as board
members debated the issue, but in the end the asso-
ciation's board decided not to oppose Wexler's
inclusion and not to support calls by some to
boycott the meeting.

"ASJA did not have any objection to the pre-
sence of Anna Wexler. ... The basic principle was:
This is an international conference involving all
nationalities without exception," says ASJA
President Nehal Lasheen.

In a May letter published in English and Arabic,
the [WFSJ] board expressed "full support" for the
ASJA board and the conference organizers' decision
to run an "all-inclusive" conference.

But some ASJA members were not happy and
criticized El-Awady and other organizers for their
decision to allow Wexler to speak. ASJA board
member Hanan Alqueswany from Jordan decided
to boycott the conference, and Algerian journalist
Mohammed Hussein Tolby canceled his member-
ship of ASJA, which has roughly 200 members.

Deborah Blum, program chair for the confer-
ence, decided to remove Wexler from the original
panel and create a new one, devoted to film, to
allow her to speak while keeping Osama on the
program. (Wexler had done video journalism, sug-
gesting a way to keep both journalists on the
program.) "I was really pissed...but this was the best
way," says Blum, a journalist and professor at the
University of Wisconsin, Madison. "I considered
this a totally inclusive conference."

"I didn't want to be engaged in sending any
unintended political messages by joining the same
panel with Anna, so I thought it was best that each
of us participate in the conference but in separate
sessions," said Osama, who would not say whether
she agreed or not with her journalists' union's posi-
tion. "Engaging in the process of normalization can
tarnish one's professional reputation. So Arabs of all
professions need to deal very sensitively with situa-
tions in which an Israeli representative participates,
whether there is a rule against this or not."

The 22 Arab journalists participating in a train-
ing program run by the World Federation were told
by program managers that attending the

conference was mandatory. All attended except for two Jordanian journalists, who had signed a pledge with their national press union not to attend the event because of Wexler's inclusion. The World Federation is debating whether they will be forced to leave the tutoring program, says Director Jean-Marc Fleury. But one of the trainees who declined to attend, Farrah Attayat of *Al Ghad Newspaper*, in Amman, has no regrets. "It's not that my union said something. I am not going to any conference that Israel is a part of," she says.

"There was plenty of drama before the conference...and there was a point where I was considering whether I should withdraw," says Wexler. But in the end she says she accepted the new arrangement; she calls the conference a "good news" story. The audience of her session included a number of Muslim women wearing head scarves, and nobody objected to her speaking, she says.

Meanwhile, a session on teaching science journalism in the Arabic-speaking world lost one of its speakers because Israeli officials at a checkpoint prevented Palestinian journalism professor Farid Abu Dheir of the An-Najah National University in Nablus from leaving the occupied West Bank. He was trying to travel to Doha the day before the conference.

Abu Dheir, who had proper exit documents, says he was given a document that said his ties to "Hamas outside of Palestine" were the reason for him being stopped. "I totally deny this, and I offered to sign an obligation not to be part of any political outlawed activity," says Abu Dheir. "They also rejected this." The Israeli government did not answer requests for comment.

"I was angry about it," says Blum. "Here you have someone who is, for all we know, just a journalism professor who wants to teach science journalists. It sends a message of ill will." Several professional academics in Israel tried to help Abu Dheir, says Cornell University science communication professor Bruce Lewenstein, who organized the panel Abu Dheir was slated to be on.

Despite some difficulties, "we were able to get through [the conference] with very minimal consequences," says El-Awady. ■
"At *Science Journalism Confab*, Arab-Israeli Tensions Caused Disruptions," *ScienceInsider*, AAAS, July 12, 2011.

BIRD

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The struggle for survival intensified in 2004, when the staff learned that many of their parrots harbored an infectious wasting condition called proventricular dilatation disease (PDD). A scourge of parrot breeders for decades, PDD ravaged al-Wabra's collection.

The picture brightened only after scientists at the University of California at San Francisco identified the virus, and Watson and his team began to isolate infected individuals. The result: No new infections in three years.

Now the flock is growing again, creeping up from 51 individuals in 2007 to 55 today.

A 50-50 CHANCE

Nine of the macaws live in one aviary. A keeper opens a window leading from the birds' roosting room into the fern- and tree-filled space. One, two, three, four, five blue darts shoot out, spread their wings and soar up to perch on a high branch. Looking down at visitors, they trill and call. These instinctual warning sounds will serve them well in the forests of Brazil, their ultimate destination.

First, though, Watson and his wife, Monalysa Camandaroba Watson—a macaw expert from Brazil—need to smooth the way. In August, they

plan to move to a 6,000-acre farm bought by Saoud in northern Brazil. There, they will build a hatchery, a nursery and an aviary.

Following a step-by-step plan, they hope to introduce captive-bred macaws into the wild. Initially, they will let the birds out only at night, drawing them back to the aviary with food and water. Slowly, Ryan Watson hopes, the birds will learn to eat wild food and avoid predation.

The Watsons will test the process with a more abundant Brazilian species, the Illiger's macaw. If captive birds of that species adapt well, within three years, young Spix's macaws will be flown home.

"It's 50-50," Watson said, assessing the macaws' odds of survival. He has heard all the criticisms: There aren't enough birds for a reintroduction plan. There's too little genetic diversity. Poachers will pluck them out of the trees.

But it's time to try. "If they're not out in the wild, what's the point?" Watson asked, squinting at a setting desert sun. "Wild animals belong in the wild. Otherwise, what we're doing is not conservation." ■

"*Qatari Sheik Takes Endangered Bird Species Under His Wing*," *Washington Post*, July 10, 2011.

SURGE

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about it, *The Lancet* printed a retraction notice.

It said the Japanese hospital investigation had concluded that the researchers hadn't obtained proper patient consent; that they hadn't obtained approval for the study from the ethics committee of the hospital where they said the research was done; and that the involvement of a statistician in the clinical trial couldn't be verified.

The Lancet also pointed to a finding by the investigating committee that the trial wasn't "double-blind," a standard precaution in which neither researchers nor patients know who is getting what drug or placebo. Instead, the committee found that Dr. Nakao knew who was getting the drug combination and who wasn't—a situation many investigators consider tantamount to fraud.

By the time *The Lancet* retracted the study, concerns were growing about potential harm to patients who got the combination therapy, except in certain rare cases where patients benefited. Data from clinical trials involving high blood pressure involving diabetes, coronary heart disease, and advanced age persuasively showed that any small benefits of the combination therapy were easily outweighed by the side effects.

"Even patients with uncomplicated essential hypertension were not entirely able to escape this fashionable trend" in treatment, Dr. Messerli wrote in the *European Heart Journal*.

As often happens, the original paper had inspired clinical research by others to test the dual therapy—studies that enrolled up to 36,000 patients, according to Dr. Steen, the analyst who did a study of retractions. "If there's a bad trial out there, there will be more flawed secondary trials, which put more patients at risk," he said.

Dr. Kunz in Switzerland said *The Lancet* and its peer reviewers ought to have been more skeptical about the overly positive results and should have caught the statistical anomaly she noticed. "Journals all want to have spectacular results," she said. "Increasingly, they're willing to publish more risky papers."

The Lancet's Dr. Horton dismisses that notion. He says journals hit by fraud and error are becoming more conservative about publishing provocative research. But he also says journals and research institutions don't have adequate systems in place to properly investigate misconduct.

The apparent rise in scientific fraud, said Dr. Horton "is a scar on the moral body of science." ■
"Mistakes in Scientific Studies Surge," *Wall Street Journal*, Aug 10, 2011.

SCHOLARLY PURSUITS

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where poor personal choices were the basis for any obesity link. While health experts' opinions were validated, the public was consistently portrayed as uninformed and unable to process basic scientific information. Not surprisingly, scientists were absent from the narrative entirely, as it was the scientific community which had first suggested a risk associated with HFCS. By excluding scientists and dismissing scientific arguments in the narrative, the CRA was able to avoid presenting a balanced scientific debate in its campaign while simultaneously steering clear of the certain criticism that would be faced by presenting only one scientific perspective.

Though CRA's tactics construct an effective narrative on behalf of its member organizations, the implications for the public discourse on science are disturbing. Reinforcing Russell and Austin, Heiss points out that we recognize the role of science in creating risk, and thus we become skeptical of the context that science provides us. And, in fact, the CRA advertisements quickly portrayed those people who intended to introduce science into the argument as uninformed, wrong, and worthy of ridicule by peers. In light of the concept of risk narratives, this type of advertisement has the potential to negatively affect the way a person views science in the way he or she constructs risk, which could significantly set back the efforts of many science writers to inform public discussion.

This raises questions about the role of science writers, in providing important context for science-based conversations when there are biased stakeholders with open kiosks in the marketplace of ideas. The author calls for the development of an ethical framework for trade associations to follow in stakeholder engagement, but we're frankly skeptical of this approach and anticipate that third parties will be required to more proactively engage by providing additional context to the discourse. ■

REGIONAL GROUPS

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ancient mountains, a former river where dinosaurs waded, and a fault. In August, Hurricane Irene delayed plans for DCSWA's annual summer soiree—this year to the headquarters of the National Radio Astronomy Observatory, in Charlottesville, Va. We hope the weather will be more cooperative later in the year.

Also this summer, DCSWA continued hosting its wildly popular D.C. Science Cafes, which are free and open to the public, at the Busboys and Poets restaurant. In June, NPR's Joe Palca—co-author of the book *Annoyance: The Science of What Bugs Us*—led a discussion on the biological, psychological, and other bases for the feeling of annoyance. Audience members, who were anything but annoyed, enjoyed Mosquito Bite and Buzzing Fly cocktails made especially for the event. In August, Stephen Parker of the National Human Genome Research Institute helped reveal the importance of our "junk" DNA while attendees sipped Double Helix specialty drinks. ■

New: Science in Society entries are going online.

Entries are accepted for work published in 2011.

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