

“We are not anti-gun. We are anti-bullet hole. ...
Join us, or move over! This is our lane.”

Open letter signed by more than 30,000 clinicians after the National Rifle Association tweeted that doctors should “stay in their lane” on gun violence.

IN BRIEF

Edited by Lila Guterman

DISASTERS

Trump's tweet ignites clash over fires



Wildfires have struck semiurban areas of California, including this part of the San Fernando Valley.

As California struggles with some of the worst wildfires in its history, fire experts are panning U.S. President Donald Trump's comments about the causes. At least 44 people had died, and some 200 were missing, in three fires as *Science* went to press. In a 10 November tweet, Trump blamed the state government for “gross mismanagement of the forests.” Many researchers were quick to point out that federal officials manage two-thirds of California's forests, and that the blazes mainly struck semiurbanized areas and shrublands. “The most destructive and deadly fires in CA are NOT in forests. This is grossly irresponsible and uninformed,” tweeted wildfire scientist Crystal Kolden of the University of Idaho in Moscow. Others highlighted the role of climate change in creating the hot and dry conditions that favored fire. Ironically, Trump's comments came just weeks after a group of prominent fire scientists, the Fire Research Consensus working group, issued a report concluding that climate change is “a strong driver of fire occurrence,” and that climate and weather are the “primary drivers of fire size.”

Europe studies hormone mimics

POLICY | The European Commission has pledged to speed up research on endocrine disruptors under its next science funding program, beginning in 2021. This pledge is part of a broader plan published on 7 November to protect human health, animals, and the environment from chemicals that alter the body's balance of hormones. Since its previous strategy, in 1999, the commission has spent about €150 million on such research, and allocated another €52 million to studying testing methods. New research would focus on studying whether a “safe threshold” can be established, the “cocktail effect” of exposure to multiple disruptors, and the development of safer alternatives. The Endocrine Society says more research is welcome, but argues that completed research warrants stricter limits to exposure to these chemicals, found in products such as pesticides and plastics.

A reprieve for tigers and rhinos

WILDLIFE CONSERVATION | After saying last month that it would allow the use of tiger and rhinoceros bones and tissues “in medical research and healing,” the Chinese government has backpedaled. In a move cheered by conservationists, China re-instated its 1993 ban—at least temporarily.

Uganda deploys Ebola vaccine

PUBLIC HEALTH | The persistent Ebola outbreak underway in the conflict-ridden northeastern region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has led neighboring Uganda to start to vaccinate frontline health care workers. This is the first time the experimental Ebola vaccine is being used in a country without an outbreak. More than 2000 Ugandan health workers who live near the border will receive the vaccine, which worked well in a trial in Guinea in 2015, during the massive West African epidemic. Because the vaccine is unlicensed, Uganda's Ministry of Health had to approve its use. The DRC has vaccinated more than 29,000 people despite an armed insurgency that has repeatedly disrupted its work. Since Ebola surfaced in the DRC in August,

WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

Amazon turtles bounce back

The threatened giant South American turtle (*Podocnemis expansa*) has made a robust recovery on river beaches in the Brazilian Amazon, thanks to round-the-clock protection during its breeding season. There has been a more than ninefold increase in turtle hatchlings on beaches along a 1500-kilometer section of one of the Amazon River's tributaries since the community conservation effort began in 1977, a team led by researchers from the University of East Anglia in Norwich, U.K., reports this week in *Nature Sustainability*. The result was equivalent to adding 70,000 turtle hatchlings each year. Poachers seeking to illegally harvest meat and eggs of the turtle, which can grow to a meter, attacked just 2% of the 2000 nests on guarded beaches, compared with 99% of the 202 nests on unprotected beaches. The surveillance also provided unintended—and welcome—boosts to the populations of other species, including large-billed terns, green iguanas, and black caimans.



more than 300 people have become ill, nearly two-thirds of whom have died.

Once-wet Mars site targeted

MARS ROVER | Researchers have picked a landing site for the European-Russian ExoMars 2020 rover. Called Oxia Planum, the equatorial site contains clay-rich minerals likely formed in a large body of water, and channels that may have been cut by water some 4 billion years ago, when Mars was wetter. ExoMars, a joint project of the European Space Agency (ESA) and Russia's Roscosmos, is due to arrive in 2021. A drill, delving 2 meters below the surface, will extract samples for analysis. The mission's site selection

working group spent 5 years narrowing down eight candidate sites before picking Oxia Planum. Strongly in its favor was the lack of steep slopes and large boulders, which might have endangered the landing. ESA and Roscosmos will review the site before confirming it in 2019.

Nearby star has an icy planet

EXOPLANETS | The solar system has more company in the stellar neighborhood. After the 2016 discovery of a planet orbiting Proxima Centauri, the nearest star to the sun at 4 light-years away (*Science*, 26 August 2016, p. 857), researchers have now found a strong candidate around Barnard's Star, just 6 light-years from home. The new study

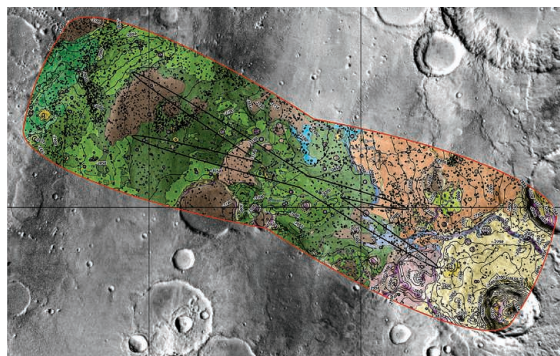
identified a faint wobble in the motion of Barnard's Star with a 233-day period—the signature of the tug of a planet at least 3.2 times Earth's mass. The study, published this week in *Nature*, drew on three telescopes' observations of the star's wobble as well as 20 years of archival data. The planet may be rocky, but its small, dim star may not shine brightly enough for surface water to be liquid, making the presence of life unlikely.

Keystone pipeline on hold

ENERGY | A federal judge has, at least temporarily, blocked an effort by President Donald Trump's administration to complete the Keystone XL pipeline, which would carry oil 1900 kilometers from central Canada to U.S. refineries. On 9 November, federal District Court Judge Brian Morris of Montana ruled that an environmental assessment by the U.S. Department of State “fell short” of a required “hard look” at the project's effects on climate change, Native American lands, and the broader environment. No work on the pipeline's final section, from Canada to Nebraska, can proceed until the department corrects flaws in its analysis, he ruled. It is the latest setback for Keystone XL, which had been blocked by former President Barack Obama at climate activists' urging before Trump resurrected it early in his presidency.

Farms need to fight bovine TB

WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT | A contentious debate rages in the United Kingdom over whether badgers must be killed in order to slow the spread of tuberculosis (TB) in cattle, a disease that costs farmers and taxpayers about £120 million a year. A new review of the issue, released on



Ellipses mark the chosen landing zone for ExoMars at Oxia Planum.

12 November, finds badgers partly to blame and says culling has a reasonable chance of helping stop disease spread. But “it is wrong to put all the blame on wildlife,” said population biologist Charles Godfray of the University of Oxford in the United Kingdom, an author of the review. Far more cases of TB result from transmission between cattle than from badgers, the review notes, so it urges the government and farmers to do more to control bovine TB on farms. For example, cattle already must be tested for TB before they are moved from high-risk areas, but the review suggests switching to a test with fewer false negatives.

Open-access plan draws outcry

PUBLISHING | Scientists are pushing back against Plan S, the scheme to end scholarly journals’ paywalls, launched 2 months ago by 11 national research funders in Europe. In an open letter published on 5 November, more than 1000 signatories say they support open access—making papers available free to all online—but condemn Plan S as “too risky for science.”

The letter slams the plan’s proposed crackdown on hybrid journals, saying it would restrict access to high-quality, rigorous journals published by scientific societies. Hybrid publications earn revenue from both reader subscription fees and article processing charges paid by authors who want to make their papers immediately accessible. The letter also warns that Plan S would endanger collaborations between grantees of Plan S funders and scientists still allowed to publish in paywalled journals.

Measles hits New York City

PUBLIC HEALTH | Measles-infected travelers returning from Israel have caused two outbreaks of the highly contagious disease in Orthodox Jewish communities in and near New York City. Between late September and 13 November, 92 cases were reported. Public health authorities report that suburban Rockland County has had 68 cases of measles in unvaccinated or undervaccinated children, teens, and adults. In Brooklyn, 24 people, at least

17 of them aged 7 months to 4 years old, had confirmed cases as of 13 November. Israel is experiencing a large measles outbreak, with 1401 cases this year through 6 November, 735 of them confirmed in October. The European Union recorded 13,453 cases of measles and 37 deaths in the 12 months that ended on 30 September. In 2017, there were 120 cases in the United States. This year there have been 220 cases through 3 November.

NIH’s racial gap partly explained

FUNDING DISPARITIES | Publication history explains roughly one-quarter of the gap in success rates between black and white researchers who apply for National Institutes of Health (NIH) funding, according to a study published this week in *PLOS ONE*. A team led by Donna Ginther, an economist at the University of Kansas in Lawrence, added detailed publication information to data in a 2011 *Science* paper by Ginther’s team, which found that black applicants’ chances of winning an R01 grant were 13 percentage points lower than white applicants’. Using 2397 applications submitted to NIH between 2002 and 2006, the team now finds that the gap narrows if they account for the quality of publications, using metrics such as journal impact factor and fraction of first-authored publications. The results suggest “that the role of bias is probably smaller” than was feared after the 2011 results came out, Ginther says.

Clinical trial disappoints

RARE DISEASES | A molecule hailed as a possible treatment for Niemann-Pick type C, an extremely rare and ultimately fatal neurodegenerative disease, performed no differently from placebo in a pivotal trial in 56 children and youths, Mallinckrodt Pharmaceuticals, based in Staines-upon-Thames, U.K., announced last week. Perplexingly, the disease did not progress in either the placebo group or in patients treated with the drug, VTS-270, during the 1-year study. Some researchers say such traditional double-blind, randomized controlled trials are likely inappropriate for extremely rare conditions. VTS-270, a sugar known as a cyclodextrin, was seen as one of the most promising collaborations between industry and the National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences in Bethesda, Maryland, part of the National Institutes of Health (*Science*, 7 October 2016, p. 18).



MUSEUMS

Berlin museum flush with funding

Berlin’s Natural History Museum received word of a windfall last week: €660 million over 10 years from local and federal governments. The money, among the largest sums ever pledged to a natural history museum, will allow it to restore buildings still damaged from World War II, preserve and digitize collections, and build a new research campus. The research campus will focus on biodiversity, environmental science, and science communication. Museum Director General Johannes Vogel had lamented the state of the Berlin buildings and collections in September, after the devastating fire at Brazil’s National Museum in Rio de Janeiro. He now says he and his staff are “over the moon” at the news, announced on 6 November.

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