



PALEOECOLOGY

## A mite-y record of the Incan Empire

**T**he history of the Andes might well be told through llama poop. During the Incan Empire, which lasted from 1438 to 1533, thousands of llamas carrying trade goods such as salt and coca leaves marched through the Marcacocha Basin, once the site of a small lake in highland Peru. Their dung washed into the lake, where it was eaten by oribatid mites, a half-millimeter-long relative of spiders. The more llamas that passed through Marcacocha, the more excrement they left, and the larger the mite populations could grow. Researchers counted the mites in a sediment core and found that their

population boomed during the Incan Empire and plummeted after the Spanish arrived, tracking the deaths of huge numbers of the Indigenous people and their animals. A more commonly used environmental proxy, spores of the dung-dwelling fungus *Sporormiella*, didn't track those historical events, the team reports in the *Journal of Archaeological Science*. Rather, the number of spores boomed during dry periods that shrank the lake. The researchers suggest that mites are better than the fungus for tracking llama populations in small, shallow lakes like Marcacocha.

telescopes to study the Cow, located in a small galaxy about 200 million light-years away. It didn't behave like a distant supernova, and its position ruled out a black hole ripping apart a star. Its steady brightness over several weeks suggests it was powered by some kind of "central engine." Whatever the Cow is, says astronomer Liliana Rivera Sandoval of Texas Tech University in Lubbock, "It's super weird."



AT2018cow is the farther right of two bright spots in the lower right of this galaxy.

## James Watson stripped of titles

**PEOPLE** | Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory (CSHL) in New York has severed its ties to James Watson after the Nobel laureate reiterated the belief that black people are intrinsically less intelligent than white people. Watson retired as CSHL chancellor in 2007 and apologized after his earlier comments appeared in London's *The Times*. But this month, Watson said in a PBS documentary that his views about genetics and intelligence have not changed. In a statement, CSHL said it "unequivocally rejects [Watson's] unsubstantiated and reckless personal opinions" and has revoked Watson's titles of chancellor emeritus, Oliver R. Grace professor emeritus, and honorary trustee.

## Plagiarism at integrity meeting

**ETHICS** | Researchers studying integrity might be expected to be full of that rare quality. That's why organizers of the sixth

World Conference on Research Integrity, to be held in Hong Kong, China, in June, were surprised to receive an abstract that was, instead, full of apparent plagiarism. After combing through all 430 submissions, they discovered 11 additional cases of suspected plagiarism. When they reached out to the authors of the abstracts—two of which, ironically, were about plagiarism—six didn't respond, one withdrew their submission, one blamed staff, and two said they had permission to use each other's work. Only two gave "acceptable" explanations, the organizers reported last week on the Retraction Watch blog.

## Harassment bill introduced

**U.S. CONGRESS** | Representative Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX), who became chair of the science committee in the U.S. House of Representatives this month, has already introduced three bills that signal her interest in topics that previous Republican leadership has shunned—and her interest

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