

edited by Mitch Leslie



IMAGES

Life's Family Album

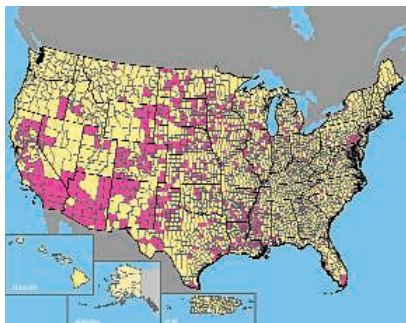
Step into The Virtual Fossil Museum for a peek into life's past. The growing site, created by physicist-turned-bio-informaticist Roger Perkins of Jefferson, Arkansas, offers a gallery of eye-catching fossil photos—from a cave bear's toothy skull to this more than 440-million-year-old impression of the trilobite *Nankinolithis* extricated from Moroccan rock. Users can browse the images by taxonomic group and by fossil location. Another section profiles famous sites such as the Chengjiang formation in China, which teems with remains of some of the earliest known animals, and the fossil-rich slate of Bundenbach in Germany. Visitors can use the museum's images, which come from fossil collectors, researchers, and other contributors, for research and education purposes.

www.fossilmuseum.net

TOOLS

West Nile Watch

Because of wet weather this year, some western states are expecting a surge in infections from the West Nile virus. The mosquito-borne disease, which first struck the United States in 1999, sickened more than 2400 people across the nation last year, killing 88. You can track this year's outbreak using a mapper from the U.S. Geological Survey. Updated twice weekly during prime mosquito months, the site charts human cases, along with reports of infected birds, horses, and sentinels—chickens or other animals that scientists test regularly to reveal the disease's presence. You can also chart where mosquitoes carrying the virus have turned up. An archive lets you compare this season's results to those from past years. Above, counties with confirmed human infections in 2004.



westnilemaps.usgs.gov

EDUCATION

Sense and Sensitivity

This tutorial from Tutis Vilis of the University of Western Ontario in Canada offers 12 animated chapters on the basics of vision, hearing, and the other senses, along with topics such as memory. Students can probe the workings of the vestibular system in the inner ear, which maintains our balance, or learn how receptors in the skin transform pressure into the sensation of being touched. The chapters also include exercises demonstrating concepts such as working memory, the mental scratch pad for temporarily storing information.

www.med.uwo.ca/physiology/courses/sensesweb

EDUCATION

Illuminating Special Relativity

One hundred years ago this month, Albert Einstein submitted his paper describing special relativity to the journal *Annalen der Physik*. Ever since, students have struggled to grasp the theory's mind-bending implications. The new tutorial Einstein Light, hosted by physicist Joseph Wolfe of the University of New South Wales in Australia, offers help. In a 10-minute multimedia program, Wolfe and a pair of animated assistants explore the intellectual background for special relativity and its counterintuitive consequences, such as that a spaceship traveling near the speed of light would seem to shorten to an observer on Earth (above). Visitors hungry for more can tuck into more than 30 pages of additional explanation.



www.phys.unsw.edu.au/einsteinlight

WEB PROJECTS

Grassroots Math Guide

If your favorite Web site suddenly shut down, you could grumble about life's unfairness, or you could decide to build a replacement. Nathan Egge and Aaron Krowne, math and computer science students at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in Blacksburg, chose the second course when a math reference they often consulted went offline. Five years later their handiwork, PlanetMath, holds nearly 4400 entries on topics from the ABC conjecture to Zsigmondy's theorem.

PlanetMath's encyclopedia section resembles Wikipedia, with site users writing and reviewing the content. Krowne, now a computer scientist at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia, estimates that math grad students contribute the largest share of the articles, with college professors, undergrads, and other visitors supplying the rest. Anyone can critique an article, but the author decides whether to revise it. PlanetMath also links to 70 free math texts, more than 30 tutorials and lectures, and a collection of published and unpublished papers.

planetmath.org

Send site suggestions to netwatch@aaas.org. Archive: www.sciencemag.org/netwatch