

RESOURCES

Twisted Logic

German chemist Friedrich August Kekulé claimed that he discovered the ring structure of the molecule benzene during his sleep, when he dreamed of a snake eating its own tail. Do the odd origins of Kekulé's hypothesis make the structure any less plausible? If you answered yes, you need a remedial session with the Fallacy Files. Gary Curtis, a philosophy Ph.D. in Austin, Texas, compiled this encyclopedia that dissects more than 100 common logical blunders, using cases from the media, books, politics, and other sources. For instance, attacking Kekulé's notion—or any idea—based on its history is an example of the genetic fallacy. Another gaffe to avoid is the Texas sharpshooter fallacy, which involves mistaken conclusions about disease clusters. >> www.fallacyfiles.org

DATABASES

Fat Finders

They tantalize our palates, jam our arteries, and hold our cells together. They are the lipids, the chemical family that includes fats, oils, steroids, and related compounds. Biochemists and other scientists can dig up data on the heavyweight molecules at this pair of sites. Lipid Metabolites and Pathways Strategy* comes from a U.S. consortium that aims to identify all the lipids in one cell type and measure their quantities. Along with a catalog of more than 7600 lipids, the site features lab protocols, research results from consortium members, and a database of proteins that interact with lipids. Lipid Bank,† from the International Medical Center of Japan and the Japan Science and Technology Agency, houses data contributed by researchers on more than 6000 molecules. The pages offer a rich mix of information, from ultraviolet and infrared spectrometry results to synthesis recipes. >>

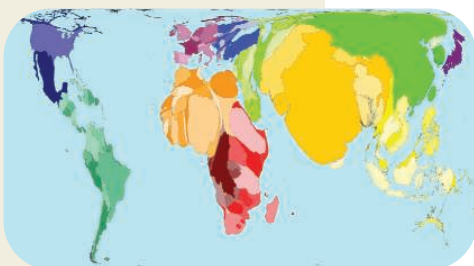
* www.lipidmaps.org

† lipidbank.jp

IMAGES

Redrawing the World

Russia is the largest country by land area. But on a map that scales nations according to total births (below), it practically disappears, dwarfed by India and China. The stark contrast in child-bearing comes from Worldmapper, created by researchers at the University of Sheffield, U.K., and the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. The site turns drab demographic and economic statistics into eye-catching maps. One hundred figures size each country according to variables such as past and predicted population, number of elderly people, and oil imports. >> www.sasi.group.shef.ac.uk/worldmapper/index.html



IMAGES

Bug-Eyed Beauties

Wander along a stream anywhere from Canada to Honduras, and you might see the glittering American rubyspot damselfly (*Hetaerina americana*; below) perched on vegetation. At OdonataCentral from entomologist John Abbott of the University of Texas, Austin, you can net data on the taxonomy and distribution of damselflies and their relatives the dragonflies. For North American states and provinces, the site offers checklists that feature interactive range maps. A field guide showcases species that buzz into Texas and neighboring states. >> odonatacentral.bfl.utexas.edu



EDUCATION

Touching the Void >>

It's like the ultimate adventure game: Board a spaceship, fly to a warped part of spacetime, and drop into a black hole.

Welcome to the visually stunning Black Holes: Gravity's Relentless Pull. This month, astronomers Roeland van der Marel of the Space Telescope Science Institute in Baltimore, Maryland, and Gijs Verdoes Kleijn of the University of Groningen in the Netherlands received the €25,000 Pirelli INTERNETional Award for the educational Web site. Its encyclopedia offers background information on how black holes form, how long they last, and more. Chairborne astronauts can zip off to destinations such as Cygnus X-1, where a black hole is sucking matter from a nearby star (above). There, you can perform virtual experiments such as dropping a clock into the void: It ticks progressively slower and freezes on the edge of the black hole. >>

hubblesite.org/go/blackholes



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