

CORRESPONDENCE

Scientists on Turkey's banknotes should inspire young minds

SIR — Countries that have adopted the euro as currency no longer commemorate their national identity with famous cultural figures on their banknotes: a sad loss. Gone, for example, are great scientists such as Carl Friedrich Gauss, who was portrayed on Germany's 10-mark note, Pierre and Marie Curie from France's 500-franc bill, and Alessandro Volta, with the demise of Italy's 10,000-lira note. For different reasons, Yugoslavia's ten-billion-dinar note honouring Nikola Tesla has also disappeared.

Happily, 2009 is witnessing a revival of 'scientific' banknotes — and not just in the United Kingdom, where the Bank of England's £10 note reminds us of the bicentenary of Charles Darwin's birth. The Republic of Turkey's latest banknotes depict Turkey's founder Mustafa Kemal Atatürk as before, but on the back they show portraits of notable intellectuals. For example, the Turkish 5-lira note commemorates Aydin Sayili (1913–93), a science historian who won a state-supported scholarship under George Sarton at Harvard University as a result of a chance meeting with Atatürk. The same banknote carries schematics of the Z-form of double-stranded DNA, rich in G–C base pairs, and a beryllium atom with orbiting electrons, both of which are echoed on a hologram foil strip on the right of the face sheet. The carmine 10-lira note portrays the Turkish mathematician Cahit Arf (1910–97) — known for his invariant, which is applied in knot theory and surgery theory — with geometric figures that are also reproduced on the hologram foil strip.

This departure reflects the significance paid to science and educational development in Turkey. The new notes delight scientists but they should also inspire young minds — in contrast

to the depersonalized euros of a unified Europe, which just indicate denominations of currency.

Turkey has more than 100 universities, both state and private, most of which were set up during the past 15–20 years. These employ some 10,000 professors, many of whom have worked abroad. Against this thriving background, it is anticipated that Turkey's new banknotes will retain their value for a long time to come.

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Protecting the Hawaii akepa population

SIR — Your News story 'Feathers fly over Hawaiian bird' (*Nature* **456**, 682–683; 2008) raises important questions about the population status of the endangered Hawaii akepa (*Loxops coccineus*) in the Hakalau Forest National Wildlife Refuge in Hawaii. It focuses on the research of Leonard Freed and his team on Hawaii's endemic birds, the implications of which have been seriously considered by the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

USFWS staff, including refuge biologist Jack Jeffrey, took several actions to ensure that Freed's research did not fall victim to differences of opinion or personality. The Hawaii Forest Bird Recovery Team was asked to review Freed's work and its management implications on multiple occasions. Also, the USFWS initiated a review of the population status of the akepa by independent scientists and hosted a workshop in October 2008, in which Freed participated, to identify research and management priorities for the refuge.

The consensus of these reviews was that the akepa population

is showing no signs of imminent collapse and faces greater threats than competition from the Japanese white-eye (*Zosterops japonicus*). The majority of the 21 scientists participating in the workshop disagreed with Freed's conclusions for several reasons.

First, they had a contrasting assessment of the population status of the akepa, based on annual abundance estimates taken over the past 21 years. These data did not suggest a population crash or a negative association with the Japanese white-eye.

Second, the scope of inference from annual surveys differed from that of Freed's work. Annual surveys were based on 300 stations established using a probability sample of the entire 13,400-hectare refuge, allowing inferences to be made for the whole refuge. Freed's conclusions were based on observations from a few small study sites within the refuge, undermining the extrapolation of his results to a refuge-wide phenomenon.

Given current budgetary challenges, management actions such as habitat restoration and the removal of hoofed animals that damage habitat are the top management priorities.

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Evolutionary gems of the plant world shine just as brightly

SIR — I applaud *Nature's* initiative in bringing together '15 evolutionary gems' (*Nature* **457**, 8; 2009; www.nature.com/evolutiongems) that provide empirical evidence for the process of evolution by natural selection. But I was struck by the

conspicuous absence of plants (not to mention invertebrates and microorganisms) from the list, which is intended for the enlightenment of non-biologists. This risks sending a wrong message, such as that there is insufficient evidence for plant evolution (or, worse, that plants are not important), when in fact many of the benchmark contributions to the understanding of plant evolution have been published in *Nature*.

Sadly, 'plant blindness' — a lack of awareness of and interest in plants in biology education and among the general population — is well documented (see, for example, E. E. Schussler and L. A. Olzak *J. Biol. Educ.* **42**, 112–118; 2008). But plants are key components in ensuring continuity of life on Earth. Their evolution intertwines at many points with that of animals.

Darwin's ideas on evolution were in part based on, and in turn influenced, his study of plants. His "abominable mystery", the perceived rapid diversification of flowering plants, still remains an important question in evolutionary biology (*Am. J. Bot.* **96**, 1–381; 2009).

Nature is well equipped to join the fight against 'plant blindness'. How about '15 more evolutionary gems' to ramp up awareness of the evidence for evolution in the plant (and invertebrate, fungal and microbial, for that matter) branches of the tree of life?
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