

## Software magnates give \$30 million to telescope

Two Microsoft billionaires gave \$30 million on 3 January to build the Large Synoptic Survey Telescope (LSST), a proposed \$389-million instrument that would make time-lapse movies of the sky, which astronomers could scour for brief celestial events.

Bill Gates gave \$10 million to the project, which has 23 partners. The foundation set up by ex-Microsoft executive and space tourist Charles Simonyi gave \$20 million.

When complete in 2014, the 8.4-metre mirror will focus light onto a 3.2-billion-pixel digital camera, taking 15-second exposures of huge swaths of the sky, scanning the entire sky every three or four nights. Planned for the mountains of northern Chile, scientists could use the LSST to watch supernovae, active galactic centres and near-Earth asteroids.

## Creator and first chair of climate-change panel dies



Bert Bolin.

Bert Bolin, who helped to create the Nobel-prizewinning Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and served as its first chairman from 1988 to 1997, died on 30 December in Stockholm, aged 82.

A meteorologist by training, Bolin performed early work on the global carbon cycle. He later served in several science advisory roles to the Swedish government and as scientific director of the European Space Agency. Bolin helped to create the IPCC's structure of three independent working groups, and guided the publication of its first two reports in 1990 and 1995.

"He was not only an excellent scientist, he was a man of impeccable integrity," says climate researcher Robert Watson, who succeeded Bolin as IPCC chair. "It was his ability to chair in an objective fashion that gave the IPCC real credibility not only with the scientific community, but with the political community as well."

## China amends patent-rights law to boost innovation

Academics in China will now be able to own the patent rights for intellectual property resulting from publicly funded work. An amended version of the Chinese science and technology constitution aims to encourage

## A colourful discovery in Costa Rica

This salamander is one of three new species recently found in Costa Rica.

At 8 centimetres, the as-yet-unnamed member of the genus *Bolitoglossa* is the largest of those found in La Amistad National Park near the southern border with Panama, the biggest forest reserve in Central America. A second *Bolitoglossa* species 6 centimetres long was also found, along with a 3-centimetre example of the *Nototriton* genus of dwarf salamanders.

Expeditions led by Alex Monro, a biodiversity expert at the Natural History Museum in London, discovered the amphibians. Researchers at the University of Costa Rica in San Pedro will describe and name the species.



A. MONRO/NHM

innovation by allowing scientists to own their intellectual property and to spin off companies using their inventions. Tax regulations will also be changed to encourage innovation in high-tech enterprises.

The amendment to the Law on Science and Technology Progress was passed on 29 December and will come into force on 1 July. The new law also allows researchers doing high-risk experiments to report them as incomplete or failed without damaging their chances of future funding.

## Zoo's abandoned polar bear cubs 'will be left to die'

Polar bear cubs born at Nuremberg Zoo in southern Germany will not be hand-reared, but will instead be left to die if their mothers reject them. Zoo officials said last week that they wanted "at all costs" to avoid the media and public attention surrounding Knut, the 13-month-old polar bear cub that was originally hand-reared at Berlin Zoo.

Nuremberg Zoo's two bears, Vera and Wilma, each gave birth to an estimated two cubs a few weeks ago in a cave in their enclosure. The cubs can be heard crying loudly, but Wilma has been observed



A newborn cub — now thought to be dead — sits by the paws of its mother at Nuremberg Zoo.

occasionally strolling out of the cave, sparking fears that she might be about to reject her cubs, like Knut's mother Tosca. It is believed that Vera's two cubs have already died and been eaten by their mother, although zookeepers have not been in the cave to check, for fear of disturbing the inexperienced mothers.

Breeding polar bears in captivity is extremely difficult. The zoo hopes that, if their babies were to die this time, having had this experience, the young females will be more likely to bring up healthy cubs the next time they give birth.

## National Academies updates book on evolution

On the same day that Mike Huckabee won the Republican presidential caucus in Iowa — having revealed during a candidates' debate that he does not believe in the theory of evolution — the US National Academy of Sciences released its latest version of a book to explain to the American public why evolution works.

It is the third time that the academy has weighed in with such educational material. "We're trying to give the public coherent explanations and concrete examples of the impact of evolution," says academy president Ralph Cicerone. The book, *Science, Evolution, and Creationism*, is available at [www.nap.edu/sec](http://www.nap.edu/sec). It includes descriptions of fossils such as the Canadian *Tiktaalik*, a creature that had features somewhere between those of fish and four-legged walking animals.

The Institute of Medicine also weighed in as a co-sponsor of the book, citing the importance of evolution for understanding infectious and emerging diseases today. **See Editorial, page 108.**