

week fleshes out intended changes to the Common Rule, a set of ethical requirements that apply to studies funded by the federal government as well as many private entities. One change would require the consent of participants prior to any analyses of their stored blood and tissue samples for additional studies unrelated to the original research, even if the samples are stripped of identifying information. Another change would simplify the often sprawling informed consent forms by moving all but the most essential components into an appendix. The new rules would also require that a research project spanning multiple institutions be consolidated under a single institutional review board. HHS and 15 other agencies will accept public comments for 90 days before releasing a final rule. <http://scim.ag/CommRule>

Long-distance robot control

NOORDWIJK, THE NETHERLANDS | In video games, feeling the response of a simulated plane to a joystick or the recoil of an onscreen gun is called force feedback, or “haptic” technology. Haptic feedback is crucial for space robotics, too: The ability to “feel” helps controllers guide robot arms to do delicate tasks. This week, the European Space Agency (ESA) put this technology to the test, when Danish astronaut Andreas Mogensen drove a rover around the grounds of ESA’s technology center—from the International Space Station, 400 kilometers above Earth. Mogensen took the wheel of Interact Centaur, a rover equipped with cameras, location sensors, and two robot arms. Signals from Mogensen’s handheld controllers traveled through a geostationary satellite to the rover, a total journey of 90,000 kilometers. Mogensen directed the rover to do tasks with sub-millimeter precision, including finding a “task board” where it pulled out and reinserted a pin into a hole.

Trained monkeys destroy nests

BEIJING | In an effort to prevent damage to military aircraft due to accidental bird strikes, China’s People’s Liberation Army has trained a squadron of male rhesus macaques to find and destroy birds’ nests. The effort, which focused on an airfield located along a major migration route for birds known as the East Asian-Australasian Flyway, was planned in advance of an airshow with jet fighters on 3 September, the 70th anniversary of Japan’s surrender at the end of World War II. The macaques scramble up trees and dismantle nests by pulling out twigs; two

Pollution and invasive sea stars threaten the spotted handfish.



Help for the spotted handfish

The charmingly awkward spotted handfish (*Brachionichthys hirsutus*) isn’t an avid swimmer; it prefers to clamber along the sandy bottom on its oddly shaped pectoral fins. Last month, the most comprehensive survey to date of this critically endangered species native to Tasmania, Australia, found just 79 handfish within its remaining habitat in the Derwent River and estuary, with three or fewer at several locations. Pollution and silt clouding the waters from farming and construction are partially responsible for its decline. But another major culprit is an invasive sea star that eats stalked sea squirts. That’s a problem because the handfish like to lay their eggs around these squirts. Biologists with the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation and the University of Tasmania are trying to recreate the handfish’s habitat by putting pieces of plastic into the sediment to replace the eaten sea squirts. The scientists will meet with Australia’s Department of the Environment next month to discuss setting up a captive breeding population in case the remaining wild fish go extinct.

monkeys dismantled about 180 nests over 1 month, a Chinese airbase commander told *China Daily* in May. Ornithologists, however, say the operation is misguided at best, and could cause stress and lead to higher mortality among migrating birds that stop in Beijing on their way south for the winter. <http://scim.ag/monkeynests>



China’s People’s Liberation Army Air Force has trained a group of macaques to drive away birds from airfields.

FINDINGS

Alzheimer’s protein: contagious?

From 1958 to 1985, 30,000 people worldwide—mostly children—received injections of human growth hormone extracted from the pituitary glands of human cadavers. The procedure was halted when researchers found that a small percentage of recipients had received contaminated injections and were developing Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease (CJD), a fatal neurodegenerative condition caused by misfolded proteins called prions. This week, a study of the brains of eight deceased people who had contracted CJD from such injections suggests that the injections may also have spread amyloid- β , the neuron-clogging protein that is the hallmark of Alzheimer’s disease. The study is the first evidence in humans that amyloid- β could be transmitted through invasive medical procedures such as brain surgery or blood transfusion, the team writes this week in *Nature*. Skeptics, however, note that the CJD prion itself often triggers unusual amyloid deposits; epidemiological