

by Scott_LaFee

MITES IN THE NIGHT

After untold years of reproducing through asexual means, a family of tiny mites has decided to go back to doing it the old-fashioned way.

"They've found a way to re-evolve sex," said Roy Norton, an environmental scientist at the State University of New York. He and his colleagues recently published their findings in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

TRUE FACTS - The South Korean government has declared a goal of a robot in every home by 2020. CNS Photo.

JUST ASKING - Why don't sheep shrink when it rains? CNS Photo.

WHAT IS IT? - A fireworm, one of a class of marine worms, produces a stinging sensation if touched. CNS Photo.

VERBATIM - 'I believe that a scientist looking at nonscientific problems is just as dumb as the next guy.' - Physicist Richard Feynman (1918-1988). CNS Photo.

MITES IN THE NIGHT - After untold years of reproducing through asexual means, a family of tiny mites has decided to go back to doing it the old-fashioned way. CNS Photo.

The publication marks the first time researchers have formally reported the revival of a complex trait like sexual reproduction after it had been long dormant. Now, the questions are why and how the mites changed course.

"We're talking about something that involves a lot of elements in both males and females," Norton said.

The oribatid mites studied by Norton are found in trees and rocks in the Southern Hemisphere. They are closely related, however, to species commonly found in soil where they feed upon fungi and detritus.

Norton speculates that at some time in the distant past, some oribatid mites moved from the relative plenty of soil life to residing in trees and on rocks, where food can be scarce. The lack of sustenance combined with increased exposure and competition likely spurred a genetic shift to asexual reproduction, since mite mates were not always available. That doesn't explain, however, why after all these years they have opted to return to having sex.

VERBATIM

"I believe that a scientist looking at nonscientific problems is just as dumb as the next guy."

- Physicist Richard Feynman (1918-1988)

BRAIN SWEAT

What are the next two letters in this series: D E J A F E M A A P M A J U J U - -

PRIME NUMBERS

\$35,000 - Amount the British military spent in 2002 researching whether psychics could find terrorist hideouts

1 in 3 - Chance that a tested psychic could, blindfolded, identify some portion of the contents of a sealed envelope

1 in 6 - Chance that a psychic fell asleep during the test

Sources: Harper's; British Ministry of Defense

TRUE FACTS

The South Korean government, which has declared a goal of a robot in every home by 2020, is working on a code of robot ethics based on science fiction writer Isaac Asimov's "Three Laws of Robotics":

1. A robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm.
2. A robot must obey orders given it by human beings except where such orders would conflict with the First Law.
3. A robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Law.

ELECTRON INK

SwarmSketch

www.swarmsketch.com

SwarmSketch is an exercise in collective consciousness. Users contribute a small amount of line per visit to a drawing, then vote on the opacity of lines submitted by other users. The resulting image is the creation of thousands, but it lasts only a few days.

BRAIN SWEAT ANSWER

AU: These are the first two letters of months, beginning with DEcember.

JUST ASKING

Why don't sheep shrink when it rains?

SURELY YOU'RE JOKING

Passing by the primate area one day, a zoo attendant noticed a chimpanzee sitting on a rock with an open book in either hand, looking first at one and then at the other. Upon closer examination, he recognized the two books as the Bible and Charles Darwin's "Origin of Species."

"What's with the books?" the attendant asked.

The chimp replied: "I'm trying to decide whether I'm my brother's keeper or my keeper's brother."

ANTHROPOLOGY 101

In parts of ancient Greece, a man who had not married by a certain age had to run naked through a public forum singing unflattering songs about himself. How, exactly, this improved his situation is not clear.

WHAT IS IT ANSWER

A fireworm, one of a class of marine worms, produces a stinging sensation if touched.

Eureka! Daily discoveries for the scientifically bent by Scott_LaFee