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MAX PLANCK INSTITUTE OF MOLECULAR CELL BIOLOGY AND GENETICS



Suzanne Eaton was a developmental biologist at one of Germany's prestigious Max Planck institutes.

RESEARCHER DEATH

Scientists pay tribute to biologist killed in Crete

Suzanne Eaton's body was found last week near the site of a meeting she had been attending.

BY ALISON ABBOTT

Scientists, friends and family members have expressed their shock and grief over the death of developmental biologist Suzanne Eaton, who was killed earlier this month on the Greek island of Crete, where she had been attending a scientific conference.

Greek police said in a statement posted online on 16 July that a 27-year-old Greek man

who was questioned as the main suspect in the homicide “admitted his guilt and today he will be brought to justice”.

Eaton's body was discovered in cave on 8 July, several days after she went missing after going out for a run. Coroner Antoni Papadomanolakis, who is investigating Eaton's death, told the German television broadcaster RTL on 13 July that the cause of her death was suffocation.

One conference attendee has also described to *Nature* what happened when researchers realized that she was missing.

Eaton, who was 59 and a researcher at one of Germany's prestigious Max Planck institutes, was last seen on 2 July. She was in Greece for a conference on insect hormones at the Orthodox Academy of Crete in Kolymbari, a coastal village in the northwest of the island. Her body was found after a ►

► five-day search, 10 kilometres from the conference venue, and police opened a homicide investigation.

On a web page posted last week by the Max Planck Institute of Molecular Cell Biology and Genetics in Dresden, Germany, where Eaton worked, colleagues describe her as a world-renowned developmental biologist of singular passion, depth and breadth.

Eaton studied how particular molecules control embryonic development in fruit flies, and she had been scheduled to give the meeting's plenary lecture two days after the date of her disappearance.

'DEEP, DEEP SORROW'

"Her curiosity and enthusiasm for discovery was infectious," write her lab members. "She was our leader, our role-model, our mentor, our friend," they say. "Her sudden and tragic death has left us stunned and enveloped in deep, deep sorrow."

Colleagues also praised the work-life balance she achieved — she was the mother of two boys, as well as a talented musician and a black belt in tae kwon do.

"She worried that it was impossible to give both her science and her family her all," writes her sister. "With a deep sensitivity and compassion, she somehow made us all a priority."

Meeting attendees were thrown into turmoil when they realized Eaton was missing, says François Leulier, a molecular geneticist at the Institute of Functional Genomics of Lyon, France, who was also a conference plenary speaker. They had seen Eaton playing the piano on the afternoon that she disappeared, and thought little of the fact that she did not attend the evening session that day, he says.

There were no lectures the following afternoon and some attendees, including the meeting organizers, began to discuss Eaton's absence. "We hoped that she had joined the conference excursion, but when they returned for the evening session without her we were really worried," says Leulier.

"With her extensive scientific culture, she brought a richness to every meeting."

The group of attendees went to her room and found the wake-up alarm on her smartphone still ringing, indicating that she had not been there overnight. They drove straight to the police to report her missing, Leulier says, then at daybreak they divided into search groups and began to comb the shore and trails. Later that day, the police asked the scientists to remain at the conference centre to allow them to take charge of the search.

Leulier says he knew Eaton from the international conference circuit, where she was renowned for driving lively discussions. "With her extensive scientific culture, she brought a richness to every meeting," he says. "She asked probing questions on every subject in such a subtle, empathic and positive way."

During her career, Eaton had also been a staff scientist at the European Molecular Biology Laboratory (EMBL) in Heidelberg, Germany. "The EMBL community is in shock and mourning," says a tribute web page posted by the laboratory. Cell biologist Kai Simons, Eaton's mentor at EMBL, writes that "she represented a modern Renaissance scientist in the sheer scope of her activities". ■

SOLAR SYSTEM

Japanese spacecraft probes asteroid's guts for first time

Hayabusa2 touched down on Ryugu to collect material from beneath the surface.

BY DAVIDE CASTELVECCHI

Japan's Hayabusa2 asteroid mission has performed the last major act in its saga of space exploration. At 10:18 a.m. Tokyo time on 11 July, the spacecraft descended on the asteroid Ryugu for the second time this year,

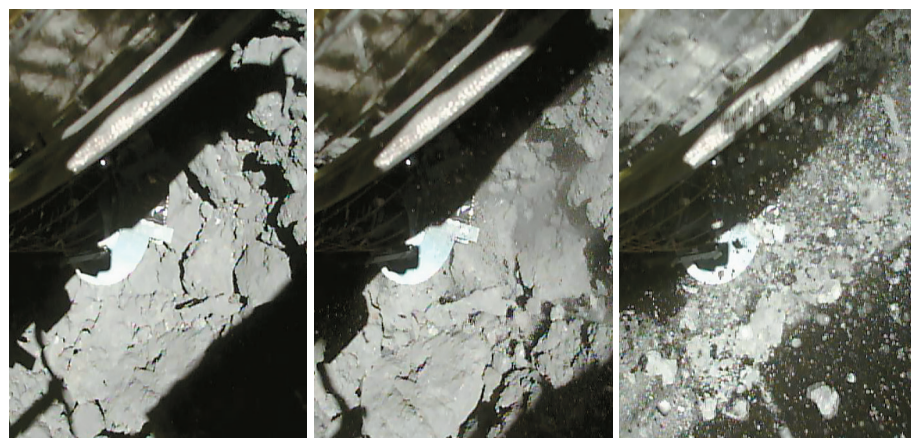
to collect material from a crater it gouged out in April by striking the body's surface with a pellet. If the collection was successful — something that the mission team will not know for a while — it will be the first time in history that a mission has gathered material from an asteroid's innards.

The probe collected a sample from Ryugu's surface in February. After it returns its booty to Earth next year, scientists will be able to compare the composition of material from the two touchdown sites. That could reveal how exposure to the rigours of space, and in particular solar heating, solar wind and cosmic rays, affected the chemistry on the surface.

"This is a cornucopia of a mission," says Lucy McFadden, a planetary astronomer at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, Maryland.

Hayabusa2 arrived at Ryugu in June 2018. It deployed landers that took magnetic, chemical and other measurements and sent pictures back. The spacecraft completed its first touchdown in February this year and then, in April, it shot a projectile that produced a 10-metre-wide crater, uncovering material under the asteroid's surface. Later this year, Hayabusa2 will turn back to Earth, where by the end of 2020 it is expected to deliver its samples for analysis.

In its latest move, Hayabusa2 aimed for a spot just outside the crater, rather than



Images taken by Hayabusa2 as it descended towards the asteroid Ryugu.

JAXA