

# Correspondence

## Japan's commercial whaling doomed?

The International Whaling Commission started granting whaling permits to Japan for scientific, but not commercial, purposes in 1986. Japan has now left the commission and discontinued its whale research. It officially resumed commercial whaling on 1 July. In the long run, however, whaling could be a shrinking business.

The Japanese government provided about US\$46 million in subsidies for research to define acceptable whale-hunting quotas. The meat was subsequently sold for food at a price publicly decided by the Fisheries Agency of Japan and other organizations.

The withdrawal of this subsidy could encourage commercial whaling, which one firm has already started. However, production of whale meat in Japan has dropped to about 1.5% of its peak in 1962 (roughly 230,000 tonnes) — even though the human population has since increased by around 32%. Whale-meat prices are likely to go up because the cost of whaling is rising, which could further reduce demand. Moreover, Japan's population seems to be increasingly sympathetic to the global protection of whales, and whale watching has become a popular tourist attraction.

This could be a good time for a global consortium to set up a compensation scheme for whaling countries that refrain from the practice (S. Managi and M. Wakamatsu *Nature* **546**, 352; 2017).

**Shunsuke Managi** *Kyushu University, Fukuoka, Japan.*  
managi@doc.kyushu-u.ac.jp

## Sand: governance to include artisans

Mette Bendixen and colleagues rightly identify sand mining as a sustainable-development issue, but wrongly generalize unregulated artisanal and small-scale mining of sand

as a criminal activity (*Nature* **571**, 29–31; 2019). In my experience as lead of the ACP-EU Development Minerals Programme (see [go.nature.com/2nxgwyn](http://go.nature.com/2nxgwyn)), these informal miners can usefully contribute to the governance of sand and its sustainability while improving their own livelihoods.

In Fiji, for example, we combined empirical studies of 48 extraction sites with engagement and capacity building of small sand-mining enterprises. The results persuaded the Fiji Minister of Lands and Mineral Resources to agree to phase out extraction of river sand and gravel in favour of using crushed rock from quarries.

In Cameroon, we supported the first monitoring system for sand and gravel production with the help of small-scale sand miners. In Zambia, we provided access for artisanal quarries to supply materials for large construction projects, such as the Kazungula Bridge, while improving environmental and safety outcomes on the quarry sites. And in Uganda, we worked with the parliamentary Committee on Natural Resources to develop a strategy for resolving sand-mining conflicts.

**Daniel M. Franks** *University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia.*  
d.franks@uq.edu.au

## Promoting science in minority languages

Scientific enterprises run by India's small Urdu-speaking population could serve as models to help India improve science communication across the country (see *Nature* **571**, 289–290; 2019).

Although only 4% of India's population speaks Urdu, this amounts to more than 50 million people. Most cannot read English and are far behind the mainstream in science. There are just two long-running scientific publications in Urdu: *Urdu*

*Science Mahnamah (Urdu Science Monthly)*; <http://urduscience.org> and *Science-ki-Duniya (World of Science)*; [go.nature.com/2u8cnqa](http://go.nature.com/2u8cnqa).

Mohammad Aslam Parvaiz, a botanist, has spearheaded progress in communicating science in Urdu. In 2015, he set up the National Urdu Science Congress at Zakir Husain Delhi College, where he was then principal. The congress is now held every year in different cities, on or around India's National Science Day on 28 February. Social aspects of the venture prompted the founding of the annual National Urdu Social Science Congress, now in its third year.

Parvaiz is currently vice-chancellor of Maulana Azad National Urdu University in Hyderabad. This institution was established in 1998 by an act of parliament to impart vocational and technical education in Urdu. Use of English scientific vocabulary prepares students for the international stage.

Similar initiatives could be set up by other speakers of minority languages in India to improve science communication.

**Sameen Ahmed Khan** *Dhofar University, Salalah, Sultanate of Oman.*  
rohelaakhan@yahoo.com

## Data anonymity, not 'digital consent'

Once people have provided personal information online for digital data studies (see *Nature* **572**, 5; 2019), they can be readily re-identified by third parties for commercial or malign purposes, no matter how many terms and conditions are checked off. To achieve data anonymity and to satisfy the spirit of informed consent, institutional review boards should insist that researchers abstain from collecting personal information online unless there is demonstrably no other way to reach a particular health-research milestone.

I am founder of RIWI

(<https://riwi.com>), a trend-tracking and predictive analytics firm. We collect data from everywhere in the world for agencies from G7 countries, multilateral organizations, banks and universities — without any personal identifiers or re-identification tools.

Furthermore, insights into improving health care were gained from an Internet survey of 18,000 people across low- and middle-income countries without collecting any personally identifiable information (S. Roder-DeWan *et al.* *PLoS Med.* **16**, e1002879; 2019).

At RIWI, data anonymity is sacrosanct because of respect for participants' privacy and for our own commercial self-interest. Neither we nor our clients want to incur risk arising from a putative data breach.

**Neil Seeman** *University of Toronto, Canada.*  
neil@riwi.com

## A step beyond the 'first of its kind'

We applaud the well-deserved recognition of Cassandra Extavour (see *Nature* **571**, 24–26; 2019). As former students and postdocs of Leo Buss, however, we would point out that it was Buss, not Extavour, who carried out the “first-of-its-kind” literature review of the evolution of mechanisms that specify germ cells and their implications for germline development (see, for example, L. W. Buss *Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA* **80**, 1387–1391 (1983); L. W. Buss *The Evolution of Individuality*; 1987).

Extavour's review incorporated a further 20 or so years of contributions (see C. Extavour and M. Akam *Development* **130**, 5869–5884; 2003). She expands on Buss's model in a later synthesis (see *Integr. Comp. Biol.* **47**, 770–785; 2007).

**Neil Blackstone\*** *Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, Illinois, USA.*  
neilb@niu.edu

\*On behalf of 5 correspondents;  
see [go.nature.com/2tkpjqvq](http://go.nature.com/2tkpjqvq).