



## GRIM OUTLOOK FOR CHINESE APES

Gibbons used to roam throughout southern China. Now only a handful remain in the southwest, and another species has bitten the dust. A survey of the Nangunhe Nature Reserve in China's tropical Yunnan Province has revealed no trace of the white-handed gibbon (*Hylobates lar*, above), whose piercing whoops were last heard in 1992.

A team from the Gibbon Conservation Alliance, based at the University of Zürich and the Kunming Institute of Zoology, surveyed areas where there had been reports of the species in the past 2 decades. In a report to the alliance last week, the team estimated that the last of the white gibbons disappeared a decade ago, victims of hunting and habitat destruction.

## Dino Dents

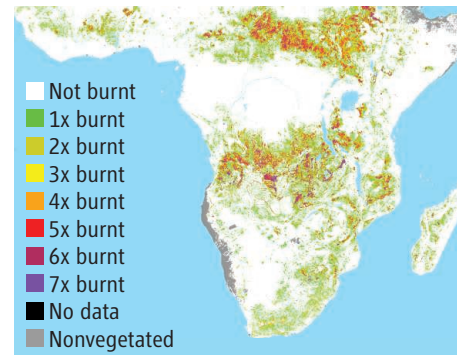
Very few dinosaur fossils have been found on the Arabian Peninsula. Now scientists have published the first report on dino footprints in the area—from a 150-million-year-old rock formation, formerly a coastal mud flat, in Yemen. This track of 15 56-centimeter-wide prints was made by a bipedal, plant-eating ornithomimid, according to Anne Schulp of the Maastricht Museum of Natural History in the Netherlands and colleagues from the United States and Yemen. The scientists, whose paper appears in the 21 May issue of *PLoS ONE*, say the site also has footprints of a herd of 11 sauropods.



data on fires “has really taken off” in global models on climate, vegetation, and atmospheric pollution, says geographer Kevin Tansey of the University of Leicester, U.K. “Ninety-nine percent of all fires on the planet are lit by humans” for clearing land, burning crop stubble, scaring up game, and introducing ash for fertilizer, Tansey says. Africa has the most burning of all, mostly in grasslands, which are often set ablaze every year. Around the world, up to 4.5 million square kilometers of vegetation—an area larger than India—burn every year, the scientists report in the current issue of *Geophysical Research Letters*.

## Scorched Earth

This map shows the frequency and extent of fires over 7 years in sub-Saharan Africa. Data came from Europe's SPOT satellite, which registers how burning of vegetation changes the reflectance of Earth's surface. The use of satellite



## Crusaders' Bug

Paleopathologists have nailed the cause of dysentery that devastated Crusaders invading the Holy Land in the 12th and 13th centuries.

“I had read the descriptions of dysentery in Crusader armies recorded in medieval chronicles but could not tell which organisms were responsible,” says Piers Mitchell of Imperial College London. Detecting dysentery-causing parasites by microscope from archaeological samples is difficult because the cysts are tiny and degrade in soil. So the team used an assay (ELISA) that uses antibodies specific to proteins produced by the parasites.

Samples were taken from two locations in Israel: a cesspool used by the citizens of Acre and the Hospital of St. John, whose latrines were used by knights, soldiers, and pilgrims. The researchers unveiled traces of two dysentery-causing parasites, *Entamoeba histolytica* and *Giardia duodenalis*, at the St. John Hospital latrine. No parasites were found in samples from the cesspool, suggesting that locals didn't suffer from the problem, the researchers write in July's *Journal of Archaeological Science*.

“We have lots of literary data on health problems during the Crusades, but until now, diagnostic abilities were not all that accurate,” says anthropologist Joe Zias of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. “I'm thinking of using [the technique] at Qumran,” location of the Dead Sea Scrolls.



Latrine at St. John Hospital.