

edited by Mitch Leslie



FUN

Star Trekking

Tired of the unchanging view from your office window? Feeling trapped in the lab? Perhaps you need a quick excursion to Mars, where you can sidle up to its lumpy moon Phobos (above). Or maybe you'd prefer to visit Betelgeuse, a red supergiant star 600 light-years away in the constellation Orion. You can complete both expeditions during your lunch hour with *Celestia*, a free space-travel simulator created by software engineer Chris Laurel of Seattle, Washington.* The program, which builds on NASA images and astronomical data from sources such as the Hipparcos star catalog, lets you tour the solar system and voyage to more than 100,000 stars. Enthusiasts have crafted hundreds of programs that boost the number of objects you can visit and add more detail to ones already in *Celestia*—for instance, one offers a high-resolution view of the sun's surface complete with solar flares. Download these supplements at the *Celestia* Motherlode.† It can take practice to master *Celestia*'s controls, and the program requires a powerful graphics card to display all features.

* www.shatters.net/celestia

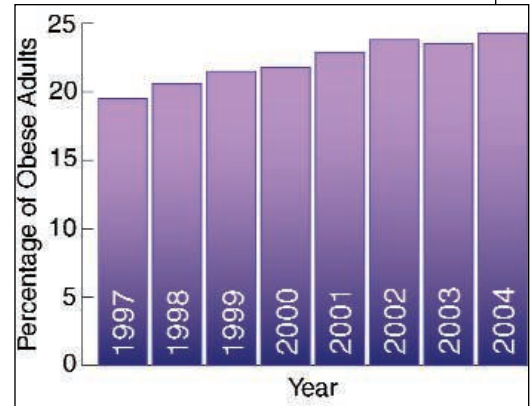
† www.celestiamotherlode.net

DATABASE

Tallying America's Health

The number of overweight and obese adults in the United States has ballooned by 20% since the early 1960s, reaching 64%. But the rate of adult obesity has leveled off since the late 1990s (right). From the girth of the nation to the prevalence of asthma, the National Center for Health Statistics's Web site stashes the numbers that reveal Americans' physical and mental well-being.

The clearinghouse lets you prowl the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC's) data collections. Click on the FASTATS index to track down nuggets of information such as the number of deaths from Alzheimer's disease every year (nearly 59,000) and the incidence of diabetes (6.6% of the adult population). A feature called WONDER guides visitors to a host of CDC documents and databases. For example, users can dig up the number of AIDS cases in different cities and view county-by-county maps of injury-related deaths. You can also read the latest results from reports such as the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, which regularly gauges Americans' health.



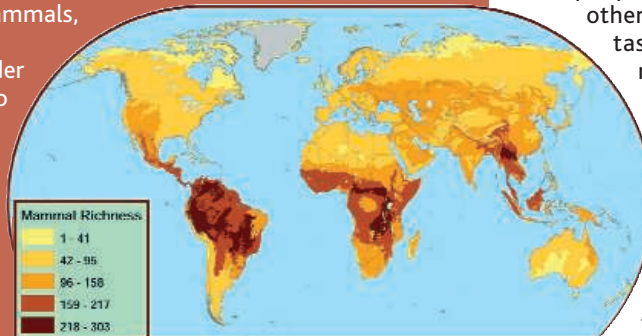
www.cdc.gov/nchs

TOOLS

A World of Vertebrates

Whether you're mad about the muskox or keen on the kea, a New Zealand parrot, check out WildFinder from the World Wildlife Fund in Washington, D.C. The new database lets users map the distributions of 30,000 species of terrestrial amphibians, reptiles, mammals, and birds.

Searching for a species in WildFinder doesn't return a conventional range map but instead shows which of the world's 825 ecoregions the animal inhabits—areas with similar environments and species. For example, the muskox roams 11 ecoregions, including the northern Canadian shield taiga and the Beringia lowland tundra of Alaska. WildFinder's maps draw on information from field guides, online databases, scientific papers, and other sources. You can also scan the database geographically to retrieve a list of the vertebrates that dwell in a particular city or country. For a global view of species diversity, visit the Map Gallery, whose offerings include this chart of mammal species numbers.



www.worldwildlife.org/wildfinder

DATABASE

When Proteins Get Fat

Bacteria rely on protein-lipid combinations known as lipoproteins to glom onto surfaces, sense their surroundings, slurp up nutrients, shuttle DNA to other cells, and perform other life tasks. Researchers can analyze more than 270 of the molecules at DOLOP, a database from the Medical Research Council Laboratory of Molecular Biology in Cambridge, U.K. Entries describe each protein, indicate its size and function, and provide links to the Swiss-Prot database, where you can parse the molecule's sequence and structural features. The site also explains the synthesis of lipoproteins and describes the lipobox, a characteristic amino acid string to which lipids attach.

www.mrc-lmb.cam.ac.uk/genomes/dolop

Send site suggestions to netwatch@aaas.org. Archive: www.sciencemag.org/netwatch