

The spider's web

The online newsstand

Scientific journals are steadily making progress towards online publishing, as described previously by *The spider* (see *Curr Biol* 1996, 6:349). It is not just the peer-reviewed journals, however, that are appearing on the net. Scientific magazines and newspapers are also going online.

There are some serious disadvantages of the web as a medium for magazines. A magazine reader often wants to rapidly skim through, rather than search for a specific item, so viewing through the web, especially if using a modem, can be an excruciating process unless the web site is well designed. And few of us are set up so as to be able to browse web sites on the bus, or in the bath. On the up side, though, as the full text of more and more scientific articles is appearing online, web-based magazines can now offer direct links to the original research referred to in features and news articles.

Science offers the full text of its paper journal online, but only to paying subscribers. But it also runs an associated web-site, Science Now (<http://sciencenow.sciencemag.org/>), which offers free access to rolling research news, updated daily. Another feature called Science Then offers a daily biography of a scientific luminary born on the day in question.

The *Science* newsroom also contributes to Academic Press's daily science news site, inSight (<http://www.apnet.com/insight/>). The stories on inSight have helpful links to many related resources, both on Academic Press's website and elsewhere on the net.

Nature (<http://www.nature.com/>) will admit to no plans to make the full text of its papers available online in the near future, but the *Nature*

Science Update section of their web site is freely available to anyone willing to fill out the registration form. "Mellow mood fosters marijuana research", a recent headline, gives a flavour of the news stories covered.

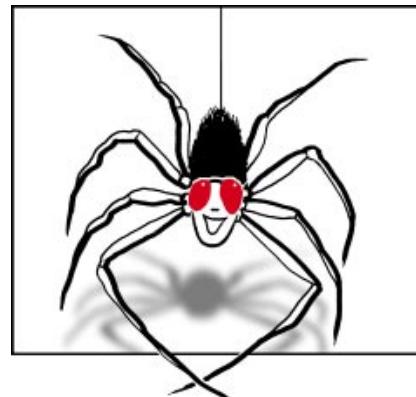
Planet Science (<http://www.newscientist.com/>) is *New Scientist's* online offering, and although the site may be too populist for some (there is a section called Strange Ways which owes rather too much to the X-files), the research news section is updated daily and there are topical features on subjects such as animal experimentation, though only a very small subset of the articles in the printed magazine are reproduced. Contributions from readers are encouraged, but these are edited and selected as in the printed magazine. There are no free-for-all discussion groups.

Scientific American's site (<http://www.sciam.com/>) is focused more on features than on news stories. Although only a few of the features from the printed magazine are made available online, they are very well done. Numerous useful links are embedded within the text, and lists of other relevant online resources are appended to each article.

The Scientist (<http://www.the-scientist.library.upenn.edu/>), an American biweekly newspaper covering life science research, offers its entire text online at no charge. It includes research and funding news, career opportunities and product reviews, and is aimed squarely at the research community rather than at the wider public.

HMS Beagle, published by BioMedNet, is the newest arrival (<http://www.hmsbeagle.com>). It has the distinction of being the first major magazine for biologists to be available solely in online form, and is free to BioMedNet members. It is edited by Sarah Greene, creator of the widely admired *Current Protocols* series of lab manuals.

A new edition of *HMS Beagle* appears every two weeks, but the



research news headlines and synopses are updated daily. These summarize the week's top research papers, and offer links to the full text of the paper concerned whenever it is available online. In addition, *HMS Beagle* contains book and software reviews, opinion pieces — some specially commissioned and some reproduced with permission from other scientific publications — as well as light relief in the form of art, essays, poems, puzzles and cartoons, all of which relate to science.

A major feature of *HMS Beagle* is the Cutting Edge debate, where invited scientists representing opposing camps in a controversial field participate in a private electronic discussion over a period of several days. The debate then appears online, and an online discussion forum is created, to allow readers to comment on the debate. The first issue of *HMS Beagle* carried a debate on "The origin of introns" moderated by Russ Doolittle.

And finally, if labwork is getting you down, you can always point your browser at the *Journal of Irreproducible Results* (<http://www.reutershealth.com/jir/>), which is guaranteed to lift even the most jaded spirits. Particularly recommended are articles on the efficacy of the peer review process (<http://www.reutershealth.com/jir/jir10.html>) and on the threat to humanity posed by that most noxious of chemicals, H₂O (<http://www.reutershealth.com/jir/jir33.html>).

Address: spider@cursci.co.uk