

Best of Last Week: New human species, nuclear batteries, stress-induced gray hair

June 28 2021, by Bob Yirka

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It was a good week for paleontological research as a team of Heriot-Watt University researchers from the Lyell Center in Edinburgh announced a surprise fossil discovery made in Tanzania—[ancient animal tracks from an unknown cloven-hoofed mammal dated back almost 2 million years](#). Also, three teams studying an ancient human-like skull housed at Hebei GEO University's Geoscience Museum announced that it represented [a](#)

[newly discovered human species](#)—the skull, from what has been described as "the dragon man," may represent one of modern human's closest relatives. And an international team of researchers found via a geochemical study that [the cause of the end-Permian mass extinction event was aerosolized nickel-rich particles ejected by a volcanic eruption](#)

In technology news, a small team of researchers affiliated with several institutions in the U.S. suggested that a new paradigm for nuclear power may be on the way, explaining why ["nuclear batteries" offer a new approach to carbon-free energy](#). And a team with members from Nokia Bell Labs, the Georgia Institute of Technology and Heriot-Watt University reported [a backscatter breakthrough that runs near-zero-power IoT communicators at 5G speeds everywhere](#). Also, a team of engineers at computer security company Eclipsium, Inc. [found vulnerabilities in Dell BIOSConnect features within Dell SupportAssist](#). And a combined team from Hanyang University and Sungkyunkwan University, both in South Korea, announced that they had created [an artificial tactile skin that mimics the human tactile recognition processes](#).

In other news, John Evans, co-director of the Institute for Practical Ethics at the University of California, San Diego, argued in an essay published in *PNAS* that [advances in CRISPR mean that the era of germline gene editing has arrived](#). Also, an international team of astronomers wondered whether [dark matter is real, if physicists are misunderstanding gravity](#).

And finally, if you have experienced premature graying of your hair, you may want to check out the results of a study conducted by a team at Columbia University's Vagelos College of Physicians and Surgeons—they found that [stress can turn a person's hair gray, and that it is reversible](#).

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Citation: Best of Last Week: New human species, nuclear batteries, stress-induced gray hair (2021, June 28) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://sciencex.com/news/2021-06-week-human-species-nuclear-batteries.html>

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