

Best of Last Week – 15,000-year-old viruses, chimps attacking gorillas, too much coffee leads to increased dementia

July 26 2021, by Bob Yirka



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It was a good week for the biological sciences as a team of researchers affiliated with multiple institutions in the U.S. confirmed via DNA

analysis that [a 93-year-old butterfly represented the first U.S. case of human-led insect extinction](#)—the Xerces blue butterfly was last seen in the early 1940s. Also, another team of researchers from across the U.S. used 3D imaging techniques to study shark intestines and found [they function like Nikola Tesla's one-way valve](#). And a team from Ohio State University, Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory and the University of Nebraska–Lincoln [discovered 15,000-year-old viruses in Tibetan glacier ice](#) and developed a new, ultra-clean method for analyzing microbes and viruses in ice without contaminating them.

In technology news, a team of researchers at Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg found that [the photovoltaic effect of ferroelectric crystals could be increased by a factor of 1,000 by using three materials arranged periodically in a lattice](#). Also, a team affiliated with several institutions in Europe discovered that [swarms of tiny, dumb, vibrating robots could carry out sophisticated actions](#), such as carrying objects and squeezing through tunnels. And a combined team from the German Aerospace Center and Technische Universität München [developed an autonomous system that could be used to assemble reconfigurable structures directly in space](#). Also, a group at the University of Zurich developed [a new algorithm that allows drones to fly faster than human racing pilots](#).

In other news, a combined team of researchers from Osnabrück University and the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology in Leipzig, witnessed, for the first time, [lethal attacks by chimpanzees on gorillas](#). The attacks occurred at the Loango National Park in Gabon and involved the deaths of two infants. Also, a team at the University of Chicago found [an existing drug that is able to inhibit the SARS-CoV-2 virus](#)—the drug masitinib is currently used to treat tumors in dogs.

And finally, if you drink coffee on a regular basis, you may want to check out the results of a study conducted by a team at the University of

South Australia who found that [excess coffee consumption can lead to a decrease in brain volume and an increased risk of dementia.](#)

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