

Best of Last Week – Glimmers of human history, new solid-state battery, health benefits of exercise in middle age

September 27 2021, by Bob Yirka

Credit: Northwestern University

An international team using genetic analysis to study human history reported [glimmers of human history as they tied a gene to growth factors](#). A shortened version of a variant known as GHRd3 appeared to

have helped people survive when resources were scarce. Also, a team with members from the U.K., Denmark, the U.S., Italy and Germany used a time transect of ancient genomic information to [learn more about the origin and legacy of the Etruscans](#). And another international team conducted an analysis of ancient DNA to [shed light on a dark event in medieval Spain](#), when Muslims were forcibly converted to Christianity.

In technology news, a combined team from Northwestern University and Delft University of Technology introduced a new platform that allowed hobbyists and programmers to build their [own battery-free electronic devices that run with intermittent harvested energy](#). Also, a team of Dutch students built what they described as [a "self-sustaining house on wheels"](#)—a new take on a solar-powered campervan. And a team of engineers from the University of California, collaborating with a group at LG Energy Solutions, created [a new solid-state battery](#) that weaves two types of battery subfields into one new kind of technology. Also, a team at Northwestern University built a winged microchip that is [the smallest-ever human-made flying structure](#). Looking like a tiny ceiling fan and about the size of a grain of sand, the "microflier" works much like a maple leaf propeller seed.

In other news, a team at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign found that [antibodies to an original strain of COVID-19 do not bind to variants](#), which suggests people infected during the first stage of the pandemic are still at risk of full infections by variants. And a team at Harvard University with assistance from the Australian government found [that melting of polar ice is shifting Earth itself, not just sea levels](#).

And finally, if you are worried about your heart health, you may want to check out research done by a team at Texas Health Presbyterian Hospital Dallas—they found that [a year of committed exercise in middle age reversed worrisome heart stiffness](#).

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