

Best of Last Week—Lingering effects of Neanderthal DNA, teaching robots to clean, a cure for high blood pressure

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Credit: Wu et al

It was an interesting week for the biological sciences, as a team of botanists at the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences reported that [wine grapes have a high deleterious genetic burden](#). Using machine

learning, they found evidence for a single domestication event of a grapevine going back more than 2,000 years. Also, a team with members from across the U.S. found [lingering effects of Neanderthal DNA in modern humans](#), such as impacts on the immune and metabolic systems, and also development. And a team at Harvard University's Department of Earth & Planetary Sciences and the Origins of Life Initiative developed two models to create [a synthetic species without biochemistry](#) while operating according to Darwinian evolutionary principles.

In technology news, a team of AI researchers at TU Delft and the Swiss technical university EPFL [used ChatGPT to design a useful robot](#) capable of harvesting tomatoes. And a team of chemical engineers at Umeå University developed [a novel electrolysis method that may soon lead to the production of cheap hydrogen](#)—a method that still uses hydrogen and water. A combined team of roboticists from Princeton University and Stanford University found [a way to teach robots to tidy up a living space](#) based on user preferences. And a team with members from across China demonstrated [a modular, continuous robot based on origami-folded tubes](#).

In other news, a team of medical scientists at the University of Queensland found that many viruses, including SARS-CoV-2 can, at times, instigate activity in the brain, leading to [cells fusing together](#), which can cause chronic neurological problems. Also, a team of anthropologists, evolutionists and biological scientists from University College London explored [the evolutionary origins and advantages of masturbation](#) among members of the animal kingdom and found that in many cases, it serves a useful purpose. And finally, an international team of medical scientists found [the cause of a common type of high blood pressure, and also a cure](#). They found it originated in a tiny benign nodule.

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