Best of Last Week-Soft robot finger, missing link in blood pressure control found and COVID-19 antibodies last 7 months
9 August 2021, by Bob Yirka

It was a good week for Earth science as an international team of researchers found a link between the rise of oxygen on early Earth and changes to the planet's rotational speed—microbial communities at the bottom of a sinkhole in Lake Huron showed that longer days could have helped increase the amount of oxygen in the atmosphere. Also, a team at Florida State University found an early atmospheric oxygen spike followed by a drop coincided with an ancient global extinction. And in another international effort, researchers found evidence of a massive, ancient lake that spread across prairies in what is now Canada, which emptied quickly enough to set off an ice age approximately 12,000 years ago.

In technology news, a team of researchers at security firm ThreatFabric announced that they had found that Vultur malware was using a new technique to steal banking credentials. Also, Ali Ahmad, a researcher at Harvard University, found that climate change leads to increases in the frequency of nuclear power outages. And a combined team from Fraunhofer FKIE and the University of Bonn developed a theoretical approach for designing a self-organizing human-swarm system—one that could lead to more advanced search and rescue mission assistance. Also, a team at Beihang University announced that they had developed a tactile sensing mechanism for soft robotic fingers that more closely resembles that of humans than other systems.

In other news, a team at the University of California-Riverside, found that common pesticides based on neonicotinoids are deadly to non-target insects regardless of the amount used on either food or ornamental plants, and in any amount used. Also, a team at the University of Virginia School of Medicine found the missing link in our body's blood pressure control. After a 60-year effort, the researchers found mechanotransducers inside renin cells detect pressure changes and transmit signals calling for changes.

And finally, if you have survived a COVID-19 infection, you may want to check out research conducted by a consortium coordinated by the Barcelona Institute for Global Health—they found that antibodies to the SARS-CoV-2 virus remain stable, or even increase, up to seven months after infection.

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