

edited by Mitch Leslie

## NET NEWS

### U.S. Federal Science Sites Top Web Rankings

Net-surfing Americans are just as pleased with many government science and health Web sites as they are with top online retailers such as eBay. That's according to the latest results of the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI), a gauge of consumer contentment based on phone surveys. Number one among government sites was the

#### Customer Satisfaction Scores

Site	URL	Score
Amazon.com	<a href="http://www.amazon.com">www.amazon.com</a>	88
MEDLINEplus	<a href="http://medlineplus.gov">medlineplus.gov</a>	86
eBay	<a href="http://www.ebay.com">www.ebay.com</a>	82
NASA	<a href="http://www.nasa.gov">www.nasa.gov</a>	79
NIST	<a href="http://www.nist.gov">www.nist.gov</a>	78
Natl. Inst. of Allergy & Infectious Diseases	<a href="http://www.niaid.nih.gov">www.niaid.nih.gov</a>	74

National Library of Medicine's MEDLINEplus, a health-education portal aimed at the general public. Its score puts it in the company of e-commerce behemoths such as bookseller Amazon.com and eBay, the online flea market (see table). Other high-ranking science sites include the home pages of NASA and the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST). To browse more survey results, visit the ACSI site.

[www.theacsi.org](http://www.theacsi.org)

## EDUCATION

### Ecology Class Goes Afield

The local cemetery might not seem like an obvious place to learn about demography, but students can gather life-span data from tombstones and compare survival patterns in different historical periods. High school and college teachers looking for ideas such as this one can check out EcoEdNet from the Ecological Society of America. The growing collection of resources includes links to useful Web sites, background reports, fact

sheets, and primers on writing papers. EcoEdNet also offers many lab and field experiments. They provide step-by-step instructions for everything from measuring population growth in duckweed to comparing how birds respond to foul-tasting "insects" made of dough and their tasty look-alikes. Entry requires free registration, and visitors can contribute their own labs or other activities.

[www.ecoed.net](http://www.ecoed.net)

## WEB TEXT

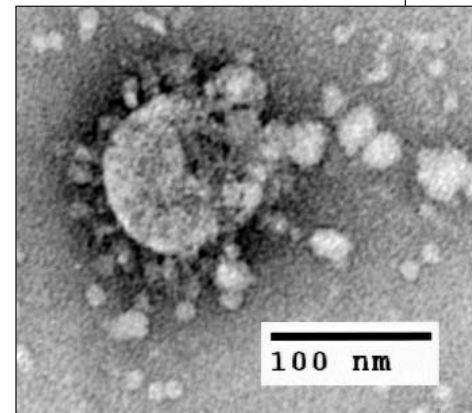
### A Book of SARS

It didn't take long for severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) to enter the textbooks. Scientists nabbed the virus responsible for the lethal lung infection only in March

2003, a little more than a month after the disease came to the attention of the international health community, and this free online SARS text is already in its third edition. Edited by infectious-disease

specialists Bernd Sebastian Kamps and Christian Hoffmann, it isn't fancy, but it presents plenty of information and includes 10 chapters from five contributors in Hong Kong and Germany. A nice timeline summarizes last year's race to identify the virus and quell the pandemic that began in southern China. Find out what we know about the habits of the SARS coronavirus (above), which can lurk in animals such as cats and ferrets, and how it spreads (mainly through tiny mucus droplets). Other chapters offer information on diagnosis and prevention and evaluate the many possible treatments doctors have tried, from assisted breathing to interferon. Readers can download versions of the book in six languages.

[www.sarsreference.com](http://www.sarsreference.com)



## RESOURCES

### Planetary Crumbs

Beyond Neptune, leftovers from the formation of the planets tumble through the region of space known as the Kuiper belt.

The belt teems with at least 70,000 chunks of jetsam that never made it into a planet during the condensation of the solar system. To learn more, check out this site created by astronomer David Jewitt of the University of Hawaii, Manoa.

Scientists first recognized the belt's existence in 1992, the site explains. Most so-called Kuiper belt objects are dim and small, around 100 kilometers in diameter. But the discovery of heftier chunks called "plutinos" has spurred some scientists to question Pluto's status as a planet; Jewitt suggests that we regard it as the foremost plutino. Astronomers will find position data for a host of Kuiper belt objects and can try spotting the "most wanted" objects that haven't been observed recently.

[www.ifa.hawaii.edu/faculty/jewitt/kb.html](http://www.ifa.hawaii.edu/faculty/jewitt/kb.html)

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