

Shrine to Darwin



Will Charles Darwin's house and its gardens soon be mentioned in the same breath as Stonehenge and the pyramids? Following a £1 million refurbishment, Down House in Kent, U.K., has been put forth by the government for designation as a UNESCO World Heritage site.

The house (<http://www.darwinatdowne.co.uk/>) reopened last week with a new permanent exhibition on Darwin's life and work. Down House's gardens, greenhouse, and surrounding fields were restored to their original setting, including the Sandwalk, where Darwin took his daily stroll. In his ground-floor study (pictured), in which he worked for 40 years, is his "desk"—a board that rested on the arms of a chair customized with wheels.

It's Not the Food

The "Flynn effect" has long puzzled intelligence researchers. Postulated in 1984 by psychologist James Flynn of New Zealand's University of Otago, it describes the steady rise in IQ scores for children and adults over the 20th century in Western nations.

Some researchers think improved nutrition, which led to pronounced height and weight gains, has also influenced mental abilities. But nutrition can't have been a major factor, Flynn argues in a paper this month in the journal *Economics and Human Biology*.

In the United Kingdom, for example, he points out that post-war IQ gains were greater among upper-class children than they were among lower-class children,



even though the latter enjoyed the greatest nutrition gains. Trends in the past 30 years are even more mystifying: While the Flynn effect has persisted for young children and adults, U.K. teens seem to be getting dumber. He reports a whopping six-point drop since 1979 among 15-year-olds in the upper half of the IQ distribution.

Flynn hypothesizes that IQs are getting a boost from people using their minds in new ways as technologies become more complex. But the U.K. data suggest "there is something about teen subculture which is extremely anticognitive," says Flynn, currently at the Russell Sage Foundation in New York City. Political scientist Charles Murray of the American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research in Washington, D.C., says the paper is pretty persuasive. "Unless I see some strong counter-evidence, [it's] going to make me stop saying that better nutrition is a plausible cause of the Flynn effect," Murray says.

Irish Expansion

Ever notice how thin people look in those old World War II movies? And how tiny children were? A paper this month in the *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health* documents how the Irish—like most of the rest of us—ballooned in the latter half of the 20th century.

Epidemiologist I. J. Perry and colleagues at University College Cork in Ireland compared data on the height and weight of Irish children from surveys conducted in 1948, 1970, and 2002. The height gain has been impressive: 14-year-old boys grew from an average 146 centimeters in 1948 to 169 cm in 2002. The weight gain, on the other hand, has been "quite staggering," says Perry: Those boys weighed 37 kilograms in 1948; in 2002, they were up to 61 kg. Girls gained 19 kg, going from 40 kg to 59 kg.

Perry says that with cheap and abundant junk food, he doubts even the current economic crisis will make a dent in the obesity epidemic.

Hummingbird Fix

The art of bird tagging is getting ever more refined. Now researchers at Oregon State University have attached tiny electronic devices, with the help of some eyelash glue, to hummingbirds.



Hummingbirds play a key role in pollinating forest plants in Costa Rica. Ecologist Matthew Betts and grad student Adam Hadley stuck 10-centimeter-long transmitters onto 20 green hermit hummingbirds, dropped them off 300 meters to 2 kilometers away from their customary stomping grounds, and tracked where they went. Although eager to get home, the birds would not fly directly across open land but took long detours to stick to forested areas, says Betts.

The tagging experiment may help explain why isolated systems often languish as tropical forest landscape is disrupted and fragmented, the authors report online in *Biology Letters*. Next, they plan to hand-pollinate flowers in both isolated and continuous areas. If the isolated plants show a bigger increase in seeds, that "will prove our point," Betts says.