Internet On-Ramp

News on the Net—Biology and Scientific News Resources on the Internet

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Science is central to human life. As such, it attracts a great deal of interest from a wide variety of people who are not science professionals. These readers of "popular science" may include graduate, undergraduate and high school students, science writers, educators, investors, research sponsors, individuals concerned about their health and others. As the popular press continues to increase its online presence through free and open access to content, numerous free online outlets have been created to cater to the curiosity of these lay scientists, as well as to scientists in general.

There are many reasons why scientists are interested in following science news. We all know how difficult it can be to keep up with the latest research findings outside of our individual disciplines. Yet most scientists still feel the need to stay informed in areas of expertise that extend beyond their own specific research. You may be a news addict, or perhaps are just interested in seeing how research similar to your own gets reported. Regardless of your motivation, the Internet can be a tremendous boon for meeting these needs for science news.

Biology Science News Sites

Many of the large sites that you probably already visit—or at least are aware of—offer access to quality science news.

- BioMedNet's ever popular HMSBeagle (<http://www.biomednet.com/hmsbeagle/>) requires registration (free), and allows users to view a variety of high-quality science news stories from *Science*, *Nature* and other journals, as well as a selection of stories from top newspapers like the *Los Angeles Times*. The stories featured on HMSBeagle are well chosen, but at the same time, they are somewhat selective and the site doesn't offer customization.
- Newswise maintains a database of news releases from a selection of organizations, including universities and non-profits, and offers this database for the use of the public and professional journalists as SciNews (<http://www.newswise.com/menu-sci.htm>) and MedNews (<http://www.newswise.com/menu-med.htm>). Newswise also offers a database of scientific and medical meetings.
- Reuters Medical News covers the top news stories in health and medicine each business day and organizes them into 17 categories. These articles are available at the Medical News Reuters Health site (<http://www.reutershealth.com/>). Reuters Health eLine, its award-winning daily consumer-health news section, offers access to its articles indexed from the last 10 days.
- Other science news sites that are worth a visit include the Science News page from the *World Scientist* (<http://www.worldscientist.com/>) and BioSpace.com (<http://www.biospace.com>), a site that offers superb news regarding the biotechnology industry.

General Science News Sites

- UniSci (<http://unisci.com/>) was one of the first daily science news sites on the Web and remains unique in that the UniSci editorial board features stories it has picked based on their scientific importance. For this reason, UniSci is a popular site among a wide range of scientists.
- INSCiGHT (<http://www.academicpress.com/inscight/>) is a joint project of the American Association for the Advancement of Science's (AAAS) *Science* magazine and Academic Press. The site includes daily news stories about scientific research from the journalists at *Science* magazine, as well as news reports from the editorial boards of Academic Press.
- Explorezone.com (<http://explorezone.com/>) offers an interesting collection of science news, with a heavy emphasis on space news and education among its other offerings.
- ScienceDaily, (<http://www.sciencedaily.com/>), a clearinghouse for science news releases, is well organized and easy to navigate. This free, advertising-supported online magazine contains news stories and press releases on a variety of research topics from astrophysics to zoology. ScienceDaily also hosts links to other major science media sites, science newsgroups (see BioBit for more information) and a free weekly e-mail update that summarizes the top science news stories of the week.
- EurekAlert! (<http://www.eurekalert.org/>) is sponsored by the AAAS and the Burroughs Wellcome Funds, and offers a searchable database of press releases from various institutions worldwide. This site contains great information from leading peer-reviewed journals as well, but like ScienceDaily, does not include news stories written by journalists or media institutions.

Customized E-mail Updates

Several organizations now offer customizable news clipping services by e-mail. These services can save time and greatly simplify your news searches.

- One of the best, Yahoo News Alerts (<http://alerts.yahoo.com/>) allows you to set up a news alert that sends one or two messages daily, including news headlines and brief descriptions, to your e-mail account. By entering some careful keywords, this service can keep you up-to-date on a wide variety of news stories from a very large number of sources. There are many such searches available on the Internet.
- The eLibrary Tracker (<http://www.tracker.elibrary.com/>) offered by the Electric Library is a similar service that searches the database each day for any topic you specify, and automatically e-mails you the latest headlines. The Electric Library's database includes popular newspapers, magazines, reference books, pictures, maps, and radio and TV transcripts. Searching for my favorite topic, "virology," the eLibrary Tracker was able to find only about one article per day, compared with 8–12 articles using the Yahoo service. Try out this database using your own keywords to know which works best for you.
- Your own scientific society may offer (or be in the process of developing) a news-clipping e-mail service. If you can find them, these are probably the premier news services available. If the service isn't currently offered by your scientific society, you may want to urge it to develop one.

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- Finally, some Web sites are developing daily or weekly e-mail news digests that can save you much time in keeping up with specific areas of science news. For example, my own Web site offers Daily Virology News (<http://www.virology.net/dvnreg.html>), a daily update from about 300 different print sources on all virology in the news.

Online Versions of Print Publications

Scientific journals and magazines are where most scientists review science news. Many of these publications also make their content available online in a variety of formats. For example, *Science* (<http://www.sciencemag.org/>) offers its current contents online for an additional fee. *Nature* (<http://www.nature.com/nature>) allows subscribers to access its full contents online, but restricts what is available to the general public. *Science News* (<http://www.sciencenews.org/>), the venerable and only weekly newsmagazine of science published in the United States, gives visitors access to its current issue and the option to search past issues. Other print publications like *The NewScientist* (<http://www.newscientist.com/>) only offer a limited selection of its print content online. *Scientific American* (<http://www.scientificamerican.com>) makes a portion of its contents available online, including most of its coverage of breaking news stories. *Discover* (<http://www.discover.com>) makes most of its content available on the Web, and includes a great science newspaper as well. *BioTechniques'* own Web site (<http://www.biotechniques.com>) also offers the latest news from Web-based biology suppliers and vendors in the BioMall section.

Your professional society's publications are often available online and can serve as a great source of targeted news covering your discipline. A good example is the American Society for Microbiology's *ASM News* (<http://www.asmtusa.org>), which is available online to members at no additional charge.

Some newspapers have nicely put together online science news pages as well. Good examples are the *Albuquerque Journal* (<http://www.abqjournal.com/scitech/>), the *New York Times'* science section (<http://www.nyt.com/yr/mol/day/national/index-science.html>), the *Los Angeles Times* (<http://www.latimes.com/news/science/science/>) and *USA Today's* science section (<http://www.usatoday.com/life/science/lsd1.htm>).

Network television news networks also maintain great online science news sites: Fox News (<http://www.foxnews.com/science/index.sml>); MSNBC (http://www.msnbc.com/news/science_front.asp); ABC (<http://abcnews.go.com/sections/science/index.html>); and the BBC (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/sci/tech/default.htm>) all offer excellent online science news sites.

Other Science News Sites of Interest

The Why Files (<http://whyfiles.news.wisc.edu/>) takes an in-depth look at selected science news stories and the science behind the hype.

Personalized News Sites

Personalized news links are also becoming more popular. Leading search engines and portal Web sites are offering customizable pages that let users select the content of their

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If you've been on the Internet for a while, you may be familiar with the previous notion of "News on Net," the USENET newsgroups. Although they generally don't contain a journalistic product—and are somewhat dated in comparison to today's chatrooms and message boards—much of the person-to-person and person-to-group news is still shared this way online.

These groups function quite simply as lists of posted messages in a bulletin-board format. You access them through your Web browser (such as Netscape) or through additional newsreader software (Newswatcher, etc.).

Thousands of topic-oriented newsgroups exist, and a few are of specific interest to biologists. The BIONET newsgroups are probably your best bet. There are over 100 BIONET groups, all of which are prefixed by "bionet" in newsgroup listings. For more information about these groups, check out the BIOSCI Web page (<http://www.bio.net/>).

Dejanews (http://www.deja.com/usetnet_home.epi) offers one of the most powerful newsgroup search-engines available, besides offering an excellent introduction to the USENET and newsgroups, in general.

own pages. Yahoo's "My Yahoo!" feature (<http://www.my.yahoo.com/r/i2>) is probably one of the best. After submitting some basic information and being given a password, users can create up to six personalized news pages using an enormous amount of content. One nice feature that you can include on your customized pages is the "news clipper," a function allowing you to save news searches based on certain keywords. You can then execute them whenever you like, simply by clicking on the saved search name. Excite (<http://www.excite.com>) and Netscape (<http://www.netscape.com>) have similar services.

Collections of News Site Links

An enormous number of news sites are available online, too many to possibly list here. To find more sites of interest to you, consult some online collections of news links. For example, Yahoo has a great collection of science news links (http://dir.yahoo.com/science/news_and_media/), as does WorldScientist.com (<http://www.worldscientist.com>).

Conclusions

The Internet can be great tool to keep you current on recent science news stories. By bookmarking a few choice Web sites and by subscribing to an e-mail news-clipping service or two, you can save valuable time while fulfilling more of your information needs.

Links to sites mentioned in this article, along with other useful news-related sites, are available at the author's Web site (<http://www.virology.net>).