EDITORS' CHOICE

edited by Gilbert Chin

NEUROSCIENCE

Watchful Waking

Sleep is traditionally thought to consist of two states: slow-wave sleep (SWS) alternates with periods of rapid eye movement (REM) sleep. These two states can easily be identified in hippocampal and neocortical EEG recordings by their distinctive activity patterns.

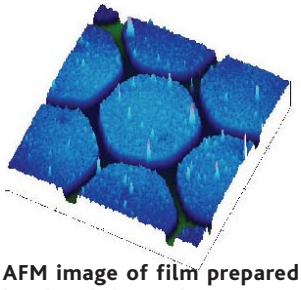
Jarosiewicz *et al.* describe a third physiological state that can consume up to 20% of overall sleep in the rat. In the hippocampal EEG, they observed a repeated pattern during sleep of small-amplitude irregular activity (S-SIA). During this state, the EEG is low in amplitude, and a small subpopulation of neurons (3 to 5% of the total cells) is active while the other cells remain virtually silent. The active cells display the features of pyramidal (complex spike) neurons and the characteristics of place cells, which denote a rat's location within its environment. The S-SIA appears several times within periods of SWS and immediately after every REM episode. The authors hypothesize that during S-SIA the animal may take in and process information from the sensorium without immediately acting on it, in contrast to SWS (which resembles drowsy waking states in exhibiting large-amplitude irregular activity) and REM or dreaming sleep (which exhibits the strong 7 to 8 hertz theta activity associated with active waking exploration). — PRS

J. Neurosci. **22**, 1373 (2002).

POLYMER SCIENCE

Patterning Thin Films with Water

Thin films can be assembled from alternating layers of polymer materials. When polyelectrolytes are used, the films are stabilized by electrostatic interactions. Weak polyacids that are stabilized via hydrogen bonds can also be used at low pH where the polyacids are not ionized. Yang and Rubner show that thermal treatment of layered poly(acrylic acid) and polyacrylamide generates imide cross links that serve to stabilize the films to physiological solutions (pH 7). Alternatively, the imidization reaction can be triggered by light after first adding a top layer containing a free-radical initiator. Patterns could be introduced in these films by using water as the etching or wash agent. For features in the 200-micrometer range, ink jet printing was used to select the areas to be removed; the printed sections that had been exposed to pH 7 water became ionized and did not react on heating. For smaller features, photolithography was used, and the masked areas, shielded from light, were then removed upon washing. — MSL



AFM image of film prepared by photolithography.

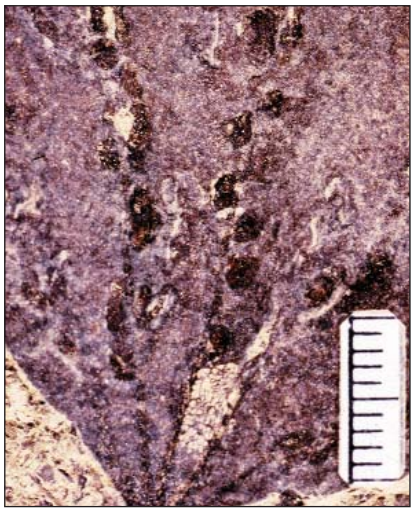
J. Am. Chem. Soc. 10.1021/ja017681y.

PALEONTOLOGY

Leaving Their Mark

The extinction of the dinosaurs at the Cretaceous-Tertiary (K-T) boundary about 65 million years ago has been traced to the impact of a large object. The fossil record of insect extinction at the K-T boundary is not as clear, and it has been assumed that insects were better able to survive the impact because of their small size, flexible lifestyles, and overall abundance.

Labandeira *et al.* analyzed 13,000 fossil plant specimens collected from above and below the K-T boundary at Williston Basin, North Dakota. For each plant, they cataloged any signs of the presence of herbivorous insects, such as holes created by feeding. Across the 51 types of plant-insect associations, most of the insects that were specialized for feeding on one kind of plant became extinct at the K-T boundary. These results also suggest that the plant-insect diversity bottleneck, which spans the first 10 million years of the Tertiary in the fossil record of Wyoming, may have been precipitated by the impact event. — LR



Fossil plants with feeding holes (left) and galls (right).

Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. U.S.A. **99**, 2061 (2002).

CLIMATOLOGY

Matching Milankovitch

It is generally agreed that changes in the amount of incident solar energy, arising from variations of Earth's orbit around the Sun, are the ultimate cause of our glacial cycles, but how well the timing of these cycles agrees with the pattern of insolation remains controversial. For example, although the start of the last deglaciation coincides with the increase in insolation at that time, the penultimate deglaciation appears to have begun thousands of years earlier than would have been expected on the basis of orbital forcing. In order to understand better the timing of glacial cycles, more glacial terminations need to be examined.

Using the same precise U-Th dating method but on entirely different samples, Bard *et al.* and Robinson *et al.* probe the timing and structure of marine isotope stage (MIS) 7, which is the interglacial period that lasted from approximately 240 to 190 thousand years ago (ka). They find substantial agreement with predictions based on orbital forcing patterns. Bard *et al.* present the growth record of an Italian stalagmite and show that the MIS 7.1 high stand of sea level occurred between 202 and 190 ka and was between 9 and 18 meters below present sea level, in good agreement with standard astronomical theory. Robinson *et al.* measure

CONTINUED ON PAGE 1605

CREDITS: (TOP) YANG & RUBNER, *J. AM. CHEM. SOC.* 10.1021/JA017681Y; (BOTTOM) LABANDEIRA *ET AL., PROC. NATL. ACAD. SCI. U.S.A.* **99**, 2061 (2002)