

Thursday, October 30, 2003

HEAT

Continued from page 6A

air flows from the Galveston Bay to land, it has an extraordinary pattern that causes many air currents to converge in the Houston area. When the sea breeze and coastline airflows meet, they rise, forming clouds and thunderstorms.

During the summer of 2005, the HEAT researchers and many A&M students will run a continuous experiment, recording the lightning patterns in Houston.

"It's going to be roughly 90 days of non-stop observations, using aircraft, radars and the lightning network," Orville said. "There are going to be a lot of students involved in this too because there's a lot of equipment to operate and the students will get field experience."

The results of the HEAT Project will help scientists understand how humans affect the climate and what pollution's role is in producing storms over industrial cities, Orville said.

"The problem is a lot bigger than Houston," Nielsen-Gammon said. "Overall, across the globe, because of (human) activities, the concentration of aerosols in the atmosphere is increasing, and that has a direct effect on the earth's climate. So this will mean a lot for the entire earth, not just Houston."

Cats, ferrets vulnerable to SARS

By Chris Kahn
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

House cats and ferrets can get the SARS virus and pass it to other animals, a new study shows, raising the obvious question: Can they give it to people?

"You might want to quarantine the pets as well as the people," suggested Dr. Robert Shope, an expert on emerging diseases at the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston. "If it's been shown that the virus can transmit from cat to cat, it doesn't take much of a leap of faith that it will transmit to humans."

Other scientists who have studied SARS say pet owners shouldn't overreact, however.

"These animals in all likelihood did not play a significant role in spread of (SARS) to humans," said Dr. Klaus Stohr, the World Health Organization's chief SARS scientist.

Besides, said Dr. Jeffrey Koplan, the former head of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "we still don't know if they can pass the virus to people."

Researchers discovered the vulnerability of cats and ferrets to SARS while searching for animals to test potential vaccines.

Their study, which will appear in Thursday's issue of the journal *Nature*, also notes a separate report that cats were found infected with the virus in a Hong Kong apartment complex where residents contracted SARS last year.

Cats and ferrets are the first pets included on an exotic list of animals scientists think may be able to harbor the virus. However, the virus seems to be so versatile that it could have jumped to humans from a variety of animals, co-author Albert D.M.E. Osterhaus said.

"Cats and ferrets are only distantly related," he said. "So this demonstrates the promiscuous nature of the virus."

The origin of the virus that killed 774 people remains unknown. Scientists believe people may have gotten the virus from animals that were infected by another source.

In China, where SARS festered for months before it grew into a worldwide menace this year, exotic raccoon-dogs, ferret badgers and civets imported into markets have been found harboring a germ that's almost identical to the SARS virus.

The exotic animals were taken off the market for several months, but some markets have begun selling them again, said Dr. Henk Bekeedam, the WHO's representative in Beijing.



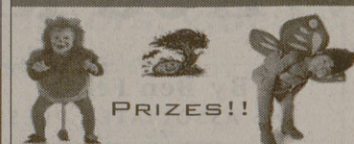
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