



RICE REVOLUTION: Scientists in Japan have achieved a breakthrough in advancing towards the next generation of genetically modified rice, which will fight allergies instead of causing them. According to report in Live Science, the new transgenic rice has been designed to fight a common pollen allergy appears safe in animal studies.

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As an exercise, Dr Miller asked readers of the blog to list the 10 most expensive things they had ever bought, and then list the 10 purchases that had brought them the most happiness. More than 200 responded. As we expected, many people used spending lots of money for stuff that hadn't brought them joy. Boats seemed to have particularly low utility in delivering happiness per dollar; many cars fit that category, too, and so did many expensive weddings.

But we were struck by how much overlap there was between the most-expensive list and the most-happy list. People repeatedly included on both lists their homes, their college education, their vacation trips, their high-priced electronics, large-screen televisions, Blu-Ray player, audio equipment, computers and certain models of cars (BMW 325, Audi A4, Jaguar, Subaru WRX, Toyota Prius, Honda Civic).

Indeed, the first trend that Dr Miller identified was the match between the happiness and expense lists. Some of this may have been because of post-purchase rationalisation, but a lot of buyers seemed to be suffering nothing but remorse. As one reader, Janet Hubbs, put it:

"The three things (not necessities) I have spent the most money on in the past 10 years are: my cottage at Cape Cod, my Lexus, and my Rolex — and I love all three, in the order of their cost. And I don't care what that says about me."

By arrangement with the New York Times

research

Kenneth Chang



Peter Dodson (left) of the University of Pennsylvania, Michael Foote of the University of Chicago and Jon Todd of the Museum of Natural History in London watching a video at the Creation Museum. PHOTO: NYT

Palaeontology, creationism meet, but they don't mesh

TAMAKI SATO was confused by the dinosaur exhibit. The placards described the various dinosaurs as originating from different geological periods — the stegosaurus from the Upper Jurassic, the heterodontosaurus from the Lower Jurassic, the velociraptor from the Upper Cretaceous — yet in each case, the date of demise was the same: around 2348 B.C.

"I was just curious why," said Dr Sato, a professor of geology from Tokyo Gakugei University in Japan. For palaeontologists like Dr Sato, layers of bedrock represent an accumulation over hundreds of millions of years, and the Lower Jurassic is much older than the Upper Cretaceous.

But here in the Creation Museum in northern Kentucky, earth and the universe are just over 6,000 years old, created in six days by God. The museum preaches, "Same facts, different conclusions" and is unequivocal in viewing palaeontological and geological data in light of a literal reading of the Bible.

In the creationist interpretation, the layers were laid down in one event — the worldwide flood when God wiped the land clean except for the creatures on Noah's ark — and these dinosaurs died in 2348 BC, the year of the flood. "That's one thing

Seventy paleontologists visited the Creation Museum in northern Kentucky for a jarring alternate view of geological history

I learned," Dr Sato said.

The worlds of academic palaeontology and creationism rarely collide, but the former paid a visit to the latter last Wednesday. The University of Cincinnati was hosting the North American Palaeontological Convention, where scientists presented their latest research at the frontiers of the ancient past. In a break from the lectures, about 70 of the attendees boarded school buses for a field trip to the Creation Museum, on the other side of the Ohio River.

"I'm very curious and fascinated," Stefan Bengtson, a professor of palaeozoology at the Swedish Museum of Natural History, said before the visit, "because we have little of that kind of thing in Sweden." Arnold I. Miller, a professor of geology at the University of Cincinnati and head of the meeting's organizing committee, suggested the trip. "Too often, academics tend to ignore what's going on around them," Dr Miller said. "I feel at least it would be valuable for my colleagues to become aware not only of how creationists are portraying their own message, but how they're portraying the palaeontological message and the evolutionary message."

Since the museum opened two years ago, 750,000 people have passed through its doors, but this was the first large group of palaeontologists to drop by. The museum welcomed the atypical guests with the typical hospitality. "Praise God, we're excited to have you here," said Bonnie Mills, a guest service employee.

The scientists received the group admission rate, which included lunch.

Terry Mortenson, a lecturer and researcher for Answers in Genesis, the ministry that built and runs the Creation Museum, said he did not expect the visit to change many minds. "I'm sure for the most part they'll be of a different view from what's presented here," Dr Mortenson said. "We'll just give the freedom to see what they want to see."

Near the entrance to the exhibits is an animatronic display that includes a girl feeding a carrot to a squirrel as two dinosaurs stand nearby, a stark departure from natural history museums that say the first humans lived 65 million years after the last dinosaurs.

"I'm speechless," said Derek E.G. Briggs, director of the Peabody Museum of Natural History at Yale, who walked around with crossed arms and a grimace. "It's rather scary."

Dr Mortenson and others at the museum say they look at the same rocks and fossils as the visiting scientists, but because of different starting assumptions they arrive at different answers. For example, they say the biblical flood set off huge turmoil inside the earth that broke apart the continents and pushed them to their current locations, not that the continents have moved over a few billion years.

"Everyone has presuppositions what they will consider, what questions they will ask," said Dr Mortenson, who holds a doctorate in the history of geology from Coventry University in England. "The very first two rooms of our museum talk about this issue of starting points and assumptions. We will very strongly contest an evolutionist position that they are letting facts speak for themselves."

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puters. "It's what geeks do," she said.

Since January, Washington State residents and small businesses have been allowed to drop off their televisions, computers and computer monitors free of charge to one of 200 collection points around the state. They have responded by dumping more than 15 million pounds