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Slashdot Deals

One of the World's Largest Organisms is Shrinking

(sciencemag.org)

Posted by msmash on Thursday October 18, 2018 @10:40AM from the troubles-ahead dept.

An anonymous reader shares a report: *The Pando aspen grove, located in central Utah, is the largest organism on the planet by weight. From the surface, it may look like a forest that spans more than 100 U.S. football fields, but each tree shares the exact same DNA and is connected to its clonal brethren through an elaborate underground root system. Although not quite as large in terms of area as the massive Armillaria gallica fungus in Michigan, Pando is much heavier, weighing in at more than 6 million kilograms. Now, [researchers say, the grove is in danger, being slowly eaten away by mule deer and other herbivores](#) -- and putting the fate of its ecosystem in jeopardy. "This is a really unusual habitat type," says Luke Painter, an ecologist at Oregon State University in Corvallis who was not involved with the research. "A lot of animals depend on it."*

[...] Scientists first noticed the Pando shrinking in the late '90s. They suspected elk, cattle, and most prominently deer were eating the new shoots, so in the new study Rogers and colleagues divided the forest into three experimental groups. One section was completely unfenced, allowing animals to forage freely on the baby aspen. A second section was fenced and left alone. And a third section was fenced and then treated in some places with strategies to spur aspen growth, such as shrub removal and controlled burning; in other places it was left untreated. The results were surprising: Simply keeping the deer out was enough to allow the grove to successfully recover; the team reports today in PLOS ONE. Even in the fenced-off plots where there was no burning or shrub removal, young trees were thriving.

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The Rate at Which the World is Getting Online Has Fallen Sharply Since 2015, New Report Suggests

(theguardian.com)

Posted by msmash on Thursday October 18, 2018 @10:00AM from the waning-charm dept.

Ian Sample, writing for The Guardian: *The growth of internet access around the world has slowed dramatically, according to new data, suggesting the digital revolution will remain a distant dream for billions of the poorest and most isolated people on the planet. The striking trend, described in an unpublished report shared with the Guardian, shows the rate at which the world is getting online has fallen sharply since 2015, with women and the rural poor substantially excluded from education, business and other opportunities the internet can provide.*

The slowdown is described in an analysis of UN data that will be published next month by the Web Foundation, an organisation set up by the inventor of the world wide web, Sir Tim Berners-Lee. The data shows that growth in global internet access dropped from 19% in 2007 to less than 6% last year. "We underestimated the slowdown and the growth rate is now really worrying," said Dhanaraj Thakur, research director at the Web Foundation. "The problem with having some people online and others not is that you increase the existing inequalities. If you're not part of it, you tend to lose out."

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US Announces Plans To Withdraw From 144-Year-Old Postal Treaty

(thehill.com)

Posted by BeauHD on Thursday October 18, 2018 @09:00AM from the times-they-are-a-changin' dept.

JoeyRdlin shares a report from USA Today: *Using special instruments, scientists have discovered weird sounds at the bottom of the world. The noise is actually vibrating ice, caused by the wind blowing across snow dunes, according to a new study. It's kind of like you're blowing a flute, constantly, on the ice shelf," study lead author Julien Chaput, a geophysicist and mathematician at Colorado State University, said in a statement. Another scientist, glaciologist Douglas MacAyeal of the University of Chicago, likened the sounds to the buzz of thousands of cicadas. The sounds are too low in frequency to be heard by human ears unless sped up by the monitoring equipment. The scientists originally buried 34 seismic sensors under the snow on Antarctica's Ross Ice Shelf to study the continent's ice shelves -- not to record the sounds they heard. "Studying the vibrations of an ice shelf's insulating snow jacket could give scientists a sense of how it is responding to changing climate conditions," reports USA Today. "Changes to the ice shelf's 'seismic hum' could also indicate whether cracks in the ice are forming that might indicate whether the ice shelf is susceptible to breaking up."*

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Scientists Discover Weird Sounds In Antarctic Ice Shelf

(usatoday.com)

Posted by BeauHD on Thursday October 18, 2018 @06:00AM from the just-in-time-for-Halloween dept.

pgmrdlin shares a report from USA Today: *Using special instruments, scientists have discovered weird sounds at the bottom of the world. The noise is actually vibrating ice, caused by the wind blowing across snow dunes, according to a new study. It's kind of like you're blowing a flute, constantly, on the ice shelf," study lead author Julien Chaput, a geophysicist and mathematician at Colorado State University, said in a statement. Another scientist, glaciologist Douglas MacAyeal of the University of Chicago, likened the sounds to the buzz of thousands of cicadas. The sounds are too low in frequency to be heard by human ears unless sped up by the monitoring equipment. The scientists originally buried 34 seismic sensors under the snow on Antarctica's Ross Ice Shelf to study the continent's ice shelves -- not to record the sounds they heard. "Studying the vibrations of an ice shelf's insulating snow jacket could give scientists a sense of how it is responding to changing climate conditions," reports USA Today. "Changes to the ice shelf's 'seismic hum' could also indicate whether cracks in the ice are forming that might indicate whether the ice shelf is susceptible to breaking up."*

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NASA Astronaut Details Fall To Earth After Failed Soyuz Launch

(cnet.com)

Posted by BeauHD on Thursday October 18, 2018 @03:00AM from the live-to-tell-the-tale dept.

After surviving an aborted launch to the ISS, NASA astronaut Nick Hague details his fall to Earth and shares what it was like inside the capsule. CNET reports: *In his first interview since surviving the largely uncontrolled "ballistic descent" back to Earth that followed, Hague told reporters on Tuesday that the launch felt normal for the first two minutes but that it became clear "something was wrong pretty quick." "Your training really takes over," Hague said, adding that he and [Russian Cosmonaut Aleksey Ovchinin] had practiced what to do in case of just such a launch-abort scenario. Hague also credited years of flight training, going back to his days as a U.S. Air Force pilot.*

The escape procedure has been compared to being launched sideways out of a shotgun -- but while the shotgun is rocketing upward, Hague described the side-to-side shaking inside the capsule as "fairly aggressive but fleeting." "I expected my first trip to space to be memorable," he said. "I didn't expect it to be quite this memorable." Because of the combination of rocket-fueled ascent and the sudden sideways escape maneuver, the crew experienced a higher level of g-forces than during a normal flight. Once the Soyuz reached the top of its arc and began to descend, Hague said, what followed was really the same as a normal Soyuz landing, but with one major difference: The pair couldn't be certain where they were. "My eyes were looking out the window trying to gauge where we were going to land." Luckily, the capsule deployed its parachutes and landed on smooth, flat terrain where Hague and Ovchinin were met by rescue helicopters and whisked off for medical evaluations.

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The Future of the Cloud Depends On Magnetic Tape

(ars Technica.com)

Posted by BeauHD on Wednesday October 17, 2018 @11:30PM from the brutal-legal-battles dept.

An anonymous reader quotes a report from Bloomberg: *Although the century-old technology has disappeared from most people's daily view, magnetic tape lives on as the preferred medium for safely archiving critical cloud data in case, say, a software bug deletes thousands of Gmail messages, or a natural disaster wipes out some hard drives. The world's electronic financial, health, and scientific records, collected on state-of-the-art cloud servers belonging to Amazon.com, Microsoft, Google, and others, are also typically recorded on tape around the same time they are created. Usually the companies keep one copy of each tape on-site, in a massive vault, and send a second copy to somebody like Iron Mountain. Unfortunately for the big tech companies, the number of tape manufacturers has shrunk over the past three years from six to just two -- Sony and Fujifilm -- and each seems to think that's still one too many.*

The Japanese companies have said the tape business is a mere rounding error as far as they're concerned, but each has spent millions of dollars arguing before the U.S. International Trade Commission to try to ban the other from importing tapes to America. [...] The tech industry worries that if Sony or Fujifilm knocks the other out of the U.S., the winner will hike prices, meaning higher costs for the big cloud providers; for old-line storage makers, including IBM, HPE, and Quantum; and, ultimately, for all those companies' customers. [...] Although Sony and Fujifilm have each assured the trade commission that they could fill the gap if their rival's products were shut out of the U.S., the need for storage continues to grow well beyond old conceptions. Construction is slated to begin as soon as next year on the Square Kilometer Array, a radio telescope with thousands of antennas in South Africa and Australia meant to detect signals emitted more than 13 billion years ago. It's been estimated the project could generate an exabyte (1 billion gigabytes) of raw data every day, the equivalent of 300 times the material in the U.S. Library of Congress and a huge storage headache all by itself.

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Chinese City 'Plans To Launch Artificial Moon To Replace Streetlights'

(theguardian.com)

Posted by BeauHD on Wednesday October 17, 2018 @10:10PM from the night-light dept.

The south-western Chinese city of Chengdu is planning to launch an illumination satellite in 2020 that is "designed to complement the moon at night," though it would be eight times as bright. "The 'dusk-like glow' of the satellite would be able to light an area with a diameter of 10-80km, while the precise illumination range could be controlled within tens of meters -- enabling it to replace streetlights," reports The Guardian. From the report: *The vision was shared by Wu Chunfeng, the chairman of the private space contractor Chengdu Aerospace Science and Technology Microelectronics System Research Institute Co (Casc), at a national mass innovation and entrepreneurship event held in Chengdu last week. Wu reportedly said testing had begun on the satellite years ago and the technology had now evolved enough to allow for launch in 2020. It is not clear whether the plan has the backing of the city of Chengdu or the Chinese government, though Casc is the main contractor for the Chinese space program.*

The People's Daily was quick to reassure those concerned about the fake moon's impact on night-time wildlife. It cited Kang Weinin, director of the Institute of Optics, School of Aerospace, Harbin Institute of Technology, who "explained that the light of the satellite is similar to a dusk-like glow, so it should not affect animals' routines."

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Essential Products, Startup From Android Creator Andy Rubin, Lays Off 30 Percent of Staff

(fortune.com)

Posted by BeauHD on Wednesday October 17, 2018 @09:30PM from the tough-business-to-be-in dept.

Essential Products, a startup founded in 2015 by Android creator Andy Rubin, was started to create a smartphone with high-end design features that wasn't associated with a particular operating-system maker. Unfortunately, reaching that goal has been harder than anticipated as the company has laid off about 30 percent of its staff. Fortune reports: *Cuts were particularly deep in hardware and marketing. The company's website indicates it has about 120 employees. A company spokesperson didn't confirm the extent of layoffs, but said that the decision was difficult for the firm to make and, "We are confident that our sharpened product focus will help us deliver a truly game changing consumer product." The firm was Rubin's first startup after leaving Google in 2014, which had acquired his co-founded firm, Android, in 2005.*

Essential's first phone came out in August 2017, a few weeks later than initially promised. It received mixed reviews, with most critics citing its lower quality and missing features relative to competing smartphones, such as a lack of waterproofing and poor resiliency to damage. The company dropped the price from an initial \$699 within weeks to \$499, and offered it on Black Monday in November 2017 for \$399.

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Trivial Authentication Bypass In Libssh Leaves Servers Wide Open

(ars Technica.com)

Posted by BeauHD on Wednesday October 17, 2018 @08:50PM from the left-wide-open dept.

Ars Technica reports of "a four-year-old bug in the Secure Shell implementation known as libssh that makes it trivial for just about anyone to gain unfettered administrative control of a vulnerable server." It's not clear how many sites or devices may be vulnerable since neither the widely used OpenSSH nor Github's implementation of libssh was affected. From the report: *The vulnerability, which was introduced in libssh version 0.6 released in 2014, makes it possible to log in by presenting a server with a SSH2 MSG USERAUTH SUCCESS message rather than the SSH2 MSG USERAUTH REQUEST message the server was expecting, according to an advisory published Tuesday. Exploits are the hacking equivalent of a Jedi mind trick, in which an adversary uses the Force to influence or confuse weaker-minded opponents. The last time the world saw an authentication-bypass bug with such serious consequences and requiring so little effort was 11 months ago, when Apple's macOS let people log in as admin without entering a password.*

On the brighter side, there were no immediate signs of any big-name sites being bitten by the bug, which is indexed as CVE-2018-10933. While Github uses libssh, the site officials said on Twitter that "GitHub.com and GitHub Enterprise are unaffected by CVE-2018-10933 due to how we use the library." In a follow-up tweet, GitHub security officials said they use a customized version of libssh that implements an authentication mechanism separate from the one provided by the library. Out of an abundance of caution, GitHub has installed a patch released with Tuesday's advisory. Another limitation: only vulnerable versions of libssh running in server mode are vulnerable, while the client mode is unaffected. Peter Winter-Smith, a researcher at security firm NCC who discovered the bug and privately reported it to libssh developers, told Ars the vulnerability is the result of libssh using the same machine state to authenticate clients and servers. Because exploits involve behavior that's safe in the client but unsafe in the server context, only servers are affected.

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Researchers 3D Print Custom-Sized Lithium-Ion Batteries

(engadget.com)

Posted by BeauHD on Wednesday October 17, 2018 @08:10PM from the baby-steps dept.

An anonymous reader quotes a report from Engadget: *[N]ew research published in ACS Applied Energy Materials shows that it's possible to 3D-print lithium-ion batteries into whatever shape you need. The problem that has stood in the way of 3D-printed lithium-ion batteries (at least, until now) is that the polymers traditionally used in this kind of printing aren't ionic conductors. The goal was to find a way to print custom-sized lithium-ion batteries in a cost-effective way using a regular, widely available 3D printer. In order to make the batteries conductive, the team led by Christopher Reyes and Benjamin Wiley infused the polylactic acid (PLA) usually used in 3D printing with an electrolyte solution. The researchers also incorporated graphene and carbon nanotubes into the design of the case to help increase conductivity. After these design modifications, the team was able to 3D print an LED bracelet, complete with a custom-sized lithium-ion battery. The battery was only able to power the bracelet for about 60 seconds, but the researchers have ideas for how to improve the capacity. For those interested, Engadget has a short video on the subject.*

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Ask Slashdot: Should Open-Source Developer Teams Hire Professional UI/UX Designers?

(Slashdot.com)

Posted by BeauHD on Wednesday October 17, 2018 @07:30PM from the deciding-what's-important dept.

OpenSourceAllTheWay writes: *There are many fantastic open-source tools out there for everything from scanning documents to making interactive music to creating 3D assets for games. Many of these tools have an Achilles heel though -- while the code quality is great and the tool is fully functional, the user interface (UI) and user experience (UX) are typically significantly inferior to what you get in competing commercial tools. In an nutshell, with open source, the code is great, the tool is free, there is no DRM/activation/telemetry bullshit involved in using the tool, but you very often get a weak UI/UX with the tool that -- unfortunately -- ultimately makes the tool far less of a joy to use than it should be the case. A prime example would be the FOSS 3D tool Blender, which is great technically, but ultimately flops on its face because of a poorly designed UI that is a decade behind commercial 3D software. So here is the question: should open-source developer teams for larger FOSS projects include a professional UI/UX designer who does the UI for the project? There are many FOSS tools that would greatly benefit from a UI re-designed by a professional UI/UX designer.*

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Facebook Lured Advertisers By Inflating Ad-watch Times Up To 900 Percent

(ars Technica.com)

Posted by BeauHD on Wednesday October 17, 2018 @06:50PM from the truth-comes-out dept.

Zorro shares a report from The Mercury News: *Not only did Facebook inflate ad-watching metrics by up to 900 percent (Warning: source may be paywalled, alternative source), it knew for more than a year that its average-viewership estimates were wrong and kept quiet about it, a new legal filing claims. A group of small advertisers suing the Menlo Park social media titan alleged in the filing that Facebook "induced" advertisers to buy video ads on its platform because advertisers believed Facebook users were watching video ads for longer than they actually were. That "unethical, unscrupulous" behavior by Facebook constituted fraud because it was "likely to deceive" advertisers, the filing alleged. The latest allegations arose out of a lawsuit that the advertisers filed against Mark Zuckerberg-led Facebook in federal court in 2016 over alleged inflation of ad-watching metrics. "Suggestions that we in any way tried to hide this issue from our partners are false," the company told The Wall Street Journal. "We told our customers about the error when we discovered it -- and updated our help center to explain the issue."*

"The plaintiffs are seeking class-action status to bring other advertisers into the legal action, plus unspecified damages," reports The Mercury News. "They also want the court to order a third-party audit of Facebook's video-ad metrics."

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Amazon Doles Out Freebies To Juice Sales of Its Own Brands

(bloomberg.com)

Posted by msmash on Wednesday October 17, 2018 @06:11PM from the how-the-tables-have-turned dept.

From getting free products shares a report: *Amazon cracked down on fake reviews two years ago by prohibiting shoppers from anonymous free products directly from merchants in exchange for writing reviews. It was a major turning point for the world's largest online retailer, changed but previously seen "incentivized reviews" as a key way for consumers to discover new products. Amazon, which had course because it realized some merchants were using such reviews to game its search algorithm, undermining faith in the customer feedback that helps drive e-commerce.*

Amazon instead used its "Vine" program, in which Amazon serves as a middleman between prolific Amazon reviewers and vendors eager for exposure. Amazon would still allow freebies in exchange for feedback so long as there was no direct contact between its retail partners and reviewers, theoretically lessening the chance of quid-pro-quo. Amazon would select shoppers eligible for the program, and Amazon vendors would pay a fee and provide free products to participate. But there was an important group excluded from the Vine program: independent merchants who supply about half the goods sold on the site.

Now those excluded merchants and review watchdogs are alleging Amazon is guilty of the review manipulation the company said it was trying to prevent. Amazon uses Vine extensively to promote a fast-growing assortment of its own private-label products, distributing free samples to quickly accumulate the reviews needed to rise in search results and boost shopper faith in making a purchase. It gives Amazon a big advantage when introducing its own brands over third-party merchants who are more vulnerable to Amazon's private-label competition than prominent brands already in stores.

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Apple Launches Portal For US Users To Download Their Data

(bloomberg.com)

Posted by BeauHD on Wednesday October 17, 2018 @05:30PM from the data-rich dept.

An anonymous reader quotes a report from Bloomberg: *Apple on Wednesday began allowing users in the U.S. to download a copy of all of the data that they have stored with the company from a single online portal. U.S. users will be able to download data such as all of their address book contacts, calendar appointments, music streaming preferences and details about past Apple product repairs. Previously, customers could get their data by contacting Apple directly. In May, when Apple first launched the online privacy portal, it only allowed U.S. users to either correct their data or delete their Apple accounts.*

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Facebook Posts May Point To Depression, Study Finds

(nbcnews.com)

Posted by msmash on Wednesday October 17, 2018 @04:51PM from the early-signs dept.

People's Facebook posts might predict whether they are suffering from depression, researchers reported this week. From a report: *The researchers found that the words people used seemed to indicate whether they would later be diagnosed with depression. The findings offer a way to flag people who may be in need of help, but they also raise important questions about people's health privacy, the team reported in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences. People who were later clinically diagnosed with depression used more "I" language, according to Johannes Eichstaedt of the University of Pennsylvania and his colleagues. They also used more words reflecting loneliness, sadness and hostility. "We observed that users who ultimately had a diagnosis of depression used more first-person singular pronouns, suggesting a preoccupation with the self," they wrote. That is an indicator of depression in some people. The team recruited 683 people who visited an emergency room for their study and asked to see their Facebook pages. Most were not depressed, but 114 had a depression diagnosis in their medical records.*

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