



Animal Extremists Get Personal

As animal-rights extremism wanes in the United Kingdom, U.S. researchers have faced increasing threats and harassment

EARLY ONE SUNDAY MORNING LAST JUNE, Arthur Rosenbaum was getting ready to go to a yoga class when his doorbell rang. A neighbor had noticed a suspicious bundle under Rosenbaum's white BMW sedan. The two walked out to the car, which was parked on the street of their leafy neighborhood near the campus of the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), where Rosenbaum is chief of pediatric ophthalmology and strabismus at the Jules Stein Eye Institute. Under the right front wheel was a plastic container full of an orangish liquid with a rag sticking out of a nozzle at one end. On the curb was a matchbook with a half-smoked cigarette woven through the matches. Rosenbaum thought it was a prank.

It turned out to be a crude incendiary device. At his neighbor's urging, Rosenbaum called the police, who quickly called in the bomb squad. By midmorning, Rosenbaum's block had been evacuated, and investigators told Rosenbaum that the device could have destroyed his car if it had gone off as intended. They suspected it was the work of animal-rights extremists, who have targeted several UCLA researchers in the past year and a half.

Rosenbaum says that at the time he didn't believe it. After all, he is primarily a surgeon, operating hundreds of times a year to correct the vision of children with eye muscle disorders. He has ties to only one animal-research project, a pilot study to test an electrical stimulator that could bring paralyzed eye muscles back to life.

That one project turned out to be enough to put Rosenbaum on the hit list of a group calling itself the Animal Liberation Brigade, which



Vandalized. This summer, ALF sprayed graffiti on the home of one researcher at Oregon Health and Science University; a colleague received similar treatment earlier this month.

claimed responsibility for the incident 3 days later in an online communiqué on 27 June. In the subsequent months, Rosenbaum says, anti-animal research activists have staged several protests at his home, sometimes at night, concealing their faces with bandanas and ski masks and using bullhorns to shout insults in "the most obnoxious, vile language." Neighbors within two blocks of Rosenbaum's house have received graphic pamphlets condemning his "imprisonment, torture, and murder of innocent primates," and his wife received a letter stuffed with razor blades and threatening physical harm unless she convinced Rosenbaum to stop his animal research.

Animal researchers in the United Kingdom have long endured such personal threats and harassment. In the United States, however, research facilities, not individuals, have been the most frequent targets—until recently. U.S. researchers have seen a spate of recent attacks by groups that consider destruction of private property and threats of personal violence to be justifiable tools in their fight to end animal research. And although recent legislation has helped U.K. police crack

Warning sign. Following protests at Oregon Health and Science University in April, vandals targeted the homes of two researchers.

down on animal-rights extremists, fewer such measures exist in the United States, leaving universities struggling to come up with ways to safeguard their researchers.

UCLA, which has had more than its share of disturbing incidents, is leading the way. After being criticized for what some considered an anemic response to earlier threats and harassment, the university crafted a plan to protect its researchers that now draws praise from many quarters. "UCLA is showing some genuine leadership," says Norka Ruiz Bravo, deputy director for extramural research at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in Bethesda, Maryland.

But that's not enough, say some researchers who have been targeted. They and others want to see scientific societies and funding agencies take a more active role. Change is needed on the legal and law enforcement fronts, too. Despite the recent incidents, there's little sense of urgency in the scientific community, says Robert Palazzo, president of the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology in Bethesda. "Where's the noise on this?" he asks.

An ugly turn of events

Overall numbers of illegal incidents by U.S. animal-extremist groups are up sharply in recent years, according to figures from the National Association for Biomedical Research (see graphic, p. 1858). Anecdotal evidence suggests that personal threats and home vandalism have risen as well. "It used to be that most of the activities centered around breaking into laboratories, ... [but now] the animal activists have decided to go after the homes and families of scientists, which has ratcheted up the anxiety and danger," says Jeffrey Kordower, a neurobiologist at Rush University Medical Center in Chicago, Illinois, and chair of the Society for Neuroscience's Committee on Animals in Research.

The troubles that had been simmering below the surface at UCLA began to boil over the night of 30 June 2006, when an incendiary device was delivered to a home in nearby Bel Air. The device was intended for Lynn Fairbanks, who studies primate genetics and behavior at the UCLA Neuropsychiatric Institute, but instead was left on the doorstep of a 70-year-old neighbor. If it had gone off, investigators concluded, the house and any inhabitants could have been engulfed in flames. On 11 July 2006, the Animal Liberation Front (ALF) claimed responsibility for planting the device.

Shortly after that incident, UCLA neurobiologist Dario Ringach announced that he was giving up his research with nonhuman primates. "Please don't bother my family any more," Ringach wrote in an e-mail to animal activists dated 6 August 2006. The subject line read simply: "You win." Ringach declined to comment for this article, but colleagues say he feared for the safety of his two young children, who had been frightened by masked protesters who came to his home on several occasions, sometimes banging on the children's bedroom window at night. The Fairbanks incident may have been the last straw. Colleagues say Ringach now conducts his research entirely with human volunteers and has not been harassed further.

In the most recent incident, on 20 October, vandals flooded the Beverly Hills home of UCLA neuropharmacologist Edythe London, breaking a first-floor window and inserting a running garden hose. Not at home that night, London and her husband discovered the damage the following day.

They expect the repairs to cost about \$30,000. In a communiqué dated 25 October, ALF activists wrote that if not for the fear of starting a brushfire, arson would have been their first choice. "It would have been just as easy to burn your house down, Edythe. As you slosh around your flooded house consider yourself fortunate this time."

Unlike many targeted researchers, London spoke out. In a 1 November editorial in the *Los Angeles Times*, she wrote that her research on the biological basis of addiction—which focuses on human brain imaging but also involves some work with primates—was motivated in part by the death of her father, a chronic smoker. "We are also testing potential treatments, and all of our studies comply with federal laws designed to ensure humane care" of animals, she wrote.

The letter elicited a variety of responses, some supportive, some not. One writer compared London, the daughter of Holocaust survivors, to Nazis who experimented on concentration camp prisoners, a common theme on Web sites and blogs of extremist groups. "They honestly and truly believe that animals are equal to Jews in the Holocaust, and they are fighting to liberate them," says one targeted researcher.

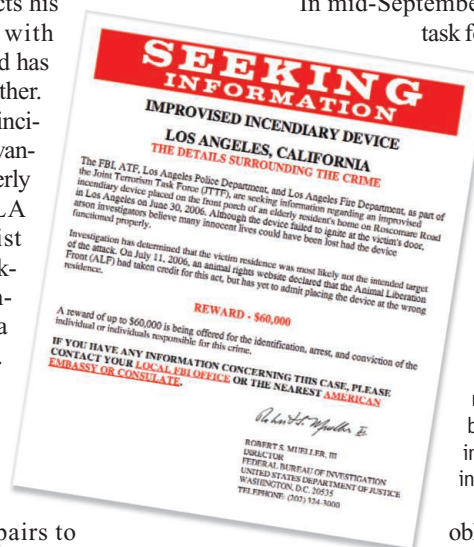
Learning from the past

In the aftermath of the 2006 attack on Fairbanks and Ringach's decision to give up his animal research, UCLA was sharply criticized for reacting too slowly and without sufficient force. An editorial by *Science* Editor-in-Chief Donald Kennedy noted that then-acting Chancellor of UCLA Norman Abrams waited several weeks before condemning the attacks in a public statement (*Science*, 15 September 2006, p. 1541). Fifteen faculty members in Ringach's department signed a 28 August 2006 letter lamenting the "apathetic" response of the UCLA community.

In mid-September, Abrams appointed a task force to look into what the

university should be doing. The task force, chaired by law school professor Jonathan Varat, delivered its report in December 2006. The document argues that the university has an

Reward. Despite hefty reward offers, no arrests have been made in two cases involving incendiary devices intended for UCLA researchers.



obligation to protect its faculty members not just on campus but at their residences as well. Many of its recommendations have been put into place, says Roberto Peccei, UCLA's vice chancellor for research. For one, the university appointed a high-level point person for all issues related to animal activism who is on call 24/7 to coordinate the response to any incidents. Under new agreements with police in surrounding communities, UCLA campus police now respond to incidents at faculty members' homes and patrol some neighborhoods previously outside their jurisdiction. The university has paid for various security measures at some faculty members' homes. Reaching out to nonviolent student groups that have animal welfare concerns is also part of the plan.

This year, when ALF claimed responsibility for the device left under Rosenbaum's car, Abrams issued a statement immediately condemning the "criminal and deplorable tactics" and reaffirming the university's commitment to protecting its faculty members and their families. UCLA's new chancellor, Gene Block, who took over from Abrams on 1 August, issued a similarly forceful statement after London's home was vandalized. She and Rosenbaum say that they're grateful for the

university's support. "There was a lot of criticism [of the response to the 2006 incidents], and I think the university took that to heart," says Rosenbaum.

Spurred by the attack on Rosenbaum, UCLA also decided not to comply with requests for animal protocols and other research-related materials made via the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). This and other public-record laws are intended to give private citizens access to information held by public agencies, and animal activists use them to gain access to research records. (The Web site of the Primate Freedom Project, for example, contains a fill-in-the-blanks FOIA request letter for research animal records, along with the addresses of several major primate centers.)

In December 2006, the university received a California Public Records Act request for animal protocols for all primate researchers from Jeremy Beckham of Salt Lake City, Utah, says UCLA campus counsel Patricia Jasper. Researchers at the University of Utah say Beckham has been an active animal-rights campaigner on campus. In response, UCLA provided redacted documents, with some names and details omitted, in April 2007, 2 months before the attack on Rosenbaum. These documents are posted in their entirety on the Animal Liberation Press Office Web site, along with a link to Rosenbaum's research project in NIH's CRISP database. That was the deciding factor, says Peccei. "I presume that this path will eventually lead us to court," Peccei says. "But we have taken the position that at this moment our researchers are in danger, and we are not willing to release these records."

Now what?

Already, the UCLA plan is being used as a model. At the University of Utah in Salt Lake City, where several researchers have been recent targets, faculty members used the UCLA plan as a guide for developing their own, says Jeffrey Botkin, chair of the university's research animals committee. The Society for Neuroscience drew on the UCLA plan for its document, *Best Practices for Protecting Researchers and Research*, scheduled for release early next year, says society president Eve Marder. She hopes that institutions will use the document to prepare before extremists

strike "so that they're never blindsided by anything that happens."

Some universities are taking additional proactive steps. The Salt Lake City Council, at the university's urging, passed a law in July that bans protests within 100 feet (30 meters) of private homes. The ordinance was modeled on similar ones in other states that have been used successfully to limit harassment of doctors who perform abortions, Botkin says.

At a workshop on animals in research at the recent Society for Neuroscience annual meeting in San Diego, California, researchers expressed frustration that NIH and other agencies aren't doing more to help protect the scientists they fund. Some, for example, would like to see NIH remove investigators' names and certain key words from the CRISP database to make it harder for animal-rights groups to find them. NIH's Ruiz Bravo balks at that idea: "We have to balance transparency in government with those kinds of genuine concerns." Others at the workshop argued that scientific societies should do more to raise public awareness of the benefits of animal research—for veterinary as well as human medicine—and to counter the assertion that researchers have no concern for animal welfare.

At the end of the day, however, scientists can do only so much, says Simon Festing, director of the Research Defence Society, an advocacy group based in London. "Animal-rights extremism is a criminal matter, and . . . we have to look to government and police to stop illegal activity." In the United Kingdom, attacks on researchers have declined sharply in recent years, largely as a result of better policing, Festing says. In 2004, for example, the United Kingdom formed a National Extremism Tactical Coordination Unit to advise local police about how to deal with extremists and prevent attacks. The unit helped coordinate a 2-year investigation involving more than 700 police, culminating in May with raids in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Belgium and the arrest of 30 suspected extremists. So far, 19 have been charged with crimes including theft and blackmail.

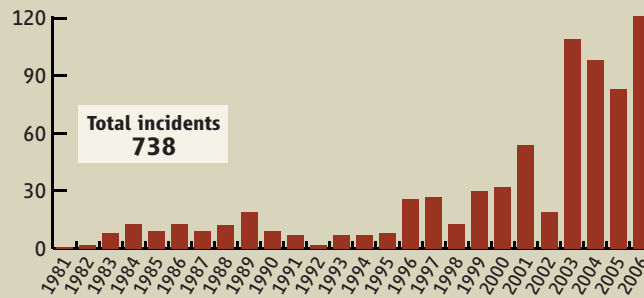
Legal changes have helped as well, Festing says. The 2005 Serious Organised Crime and Police Act gave police more power to go after extremists who wage an organized campaign of intimidation

and violence against a university or some other institution. Amendments to existing laws, such as beefed-up "antisocial behaviour ordinances" that outlaw protests at individual homes that a reasonable person would view as intimidating, have helped close loopholes exploited by animal-rights extremists, Festing says.

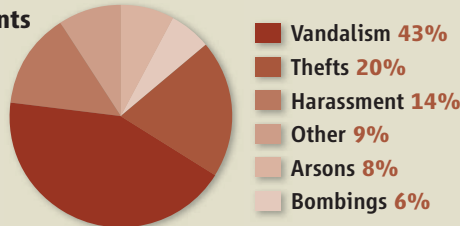
Aid for U.S. researchers may eventually come from the federal Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act, signed into law in November 2006. That law expands previous protections for "animal enterprises" such as research centers to include associated individuals and businesses. Under the law, threats and harassment at a researcher's home can now be prosecuted as acts of terrorism. (Peaceful demonstrations and other activities protected by the First Amendment to the Constitution are not affected.) The new law has not yet been used to prosecute anyone because no arrests have been made in appropriate cases, says Janice Fedarcy, special agent in charge of counterterrorism in the Los Angeles office of the FBI. Fedarcy says that it's possible the new law could be used to prosecute those behind the UCLA incidents—if and when they are caught.

—GREG MILLER

Illegal Incidents by Animal-Rights Groups by Year



Illegal incidents by type, 1981–2006



Illegal incidents by target, 1981–2006

