Editorial

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One of our continuing efforts is keeping readers up to date on the many subtle ways in which genes and environment interact to produce what Dawkins calls "The Greatest Show on Earth". This is nothing less than the grand range of life on our planet, today and in the past. We take the basic ideas of inheritance, fitness, adaptation, survival, and evolution for granted. However, their birth was far more complex and interesting than the simplified accounts given in most textbooks. Today's evolutionary biologists use their detailed knowledge of genetic and cellular mechanisms, as well as mathematical and statistical techniques needed to work out their consequences and compare to what they see in the lab and the real world. It is hard for us to imagine how these two approaches were bitterly opposed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The extensive biographical piece on Weldon, and the separate account of his ideas and work, both take us back to that era. These articles will repay close reading for anyone fascinated with evolution and the history of ideas. Future biologists should also take home another lesson – do not neglect mathematics in general and statistics in particular! As a byproduct, we learn the origins of the oft-used word 'biometric'. Today, it evokes the image of a 'Big Brother' gathering data to identify a person with certainty, for reasons good or otherwise. The word started out describing the painstaking and systematic measurements in the kingdom of crabs – see our cover!

Elsewhere in the issue, Einstein's theory of gravitation adds value to teaching planetary orbits at the undergraduate level, dead stars become the battleground between gravity and the pressure of normal or abnormal matter, soap films that will continue to surprise, and what you need to know about RFID technology which is set to invade your everyday world – be it in a library or on a highway!