

News Magazine Multimedia Subjects Surveys Careers



Taxonomic profiling of whole metagenome sequencing datasets

[The Scientist](#) » [The Nutshell](#)

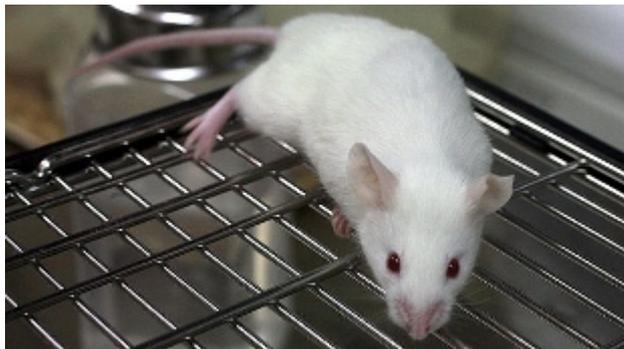
# Italy Animal Lab Trashed

**Animal-rights activists devastate a psychiatric research lab at the University of Milan.**

By Jef Akst | April 24, 2013

◀ 250

◀ 2



WIKIMEDIA, RAMA

Last Saturday (April 20), five animal-rights activists destroyed years' worth of research at an animal facility at the University of Milan's pharmacology department, releasing rodent and rabbit research subjects from their cages and swapping cage labels. They occupied the lab for about 12 hours, confusing countless experiments that rely on the genetic models of psychiatric disorders, including autism and schizophrenia. Once inside—no signs of forced entry suggest the group somehow acquired an electronic key card—two of the attackers chained themselves by the neck to the main doors of the facility, so that if anyone tried to pry their way in, they would have endangered their lives [Nature](#) reported.

"It will take three people at least a year to build up the colonies we had of mouse models of different psychiatric diseases," University of Milan neurobiologist Michela Matteoli told [Nature](#).

The attackers, who came prepared with sleeping bags and food supplies, took some of the animals and stated that they would stay until facility managers agreed to release all 800 mice and rabbits. The incident, led by the Fermare Green Hill (or Stop Green Hill) group, whose primary target is a dog-breeding facility near Brescia, Italy, drew hundreds of other animal-rights protestors outside the facility, the Italian press reported, according to [Nature](#).

Local police and Paola Viani, deputy director of the pharmacology department, negotiated with the activists, convincing them to leave with fewer than 100 animals, but were promised more later. Some of the mice the activists took, however, are immunosuppressed "nude" mice, which cannot survive outside the controlled environment of the lab.

In response to the attack, dozens of scientists gathered on Sunday to protest the ignorance and bullying of the Fermare Green Hill activists, and University of Milan researchers published [an open letter](#) explaining the value of the research that takes place at the facility. The university, which is currently assessing the full extent of the damages, may press charges, University of Milan pharmacologist Francesca Guidobono-Cavalchini told [Nature](#).

## Tags

lab animals, culture, animal welfare, animal subjects, animal rights, animal research, animal models, activists and activism

◀ 250

▶ 2



## Add a Comment



You

[Sign In](#) with your LabX Media Group Passport to leave a comment

Not a member? [Register Now!](#)

## Comments



**kienhoa68**

Posts: 37

April 25, 2013

At least the individuals who think the mice shouldn't be used might have offered themselves. It is for the benefit of all.

[Sign in to Report](#)



**DeepBlueSci**

Posts: 5

April 25, 2013

The rally in support of animal research that was held in Milan on Sunday was organized in less than a day by members of the new science advocacy group Pro-Test Italia, and received widespread coverage in the local and national media. Pro-Test Italia are organizing another rally in Milan for the end of May.

It appears that Italian scientists have had enough and are starting to stand up for science against the culture of ignorance, misinformation and bullying. It is significant that the Rector of the University of Milan has since announced that there is no agreement between the department and the animal rights extremists, that no more animals will be handed over to them, and that the University will be pressing charges against the extremists and seeking compensation for the damage they caused.

You can read more about Sunday's pro-research rally in a guest post by Pro-Test Italia on the Speaking of Research website.

<http://speakingofresearch.com/2013/04/23/pro-test-italia-in-milan-a-silver-lining-to-a-grey-cloud/>

[Sign in to Report](#)

April 27, 2013

**Lindy**

Posts: 2

Animal research hinders real medical progress. Research the facts and see for yourself! It's no good listening to the researchers, they make a good living from it! You'll only need to do a little research into animal testing, for it to reveal causing serious side effects worldwide resulting in hospitalisations every single year, drugs hastily withdrawn, clinical disasters, fatalities and don't even get me started on the incompetency and unprofessionalism of the 'researchers'! It is time the animal research industry was honest with the public and then progressed to the more superior alternative methods of testing that actually are relevant to humans!

Culture of ignorance? nice try!

[Sign in to Report](#)**Lindy**

Posts: 2

April 27, 2013

As much as those involved in animal research frequently like to imply, animal research opposers are not made up of ignorant people with no knowledge of animal research, of course it isn't. Quite the reverse is true and the very suggestion is absolutely ridiculous. Scientists, ex animal researcher, professors, doctors, knowledgeable people etc are all involved in opposing animal research on the grounds that it has shown, repeatedly, to be harmful to humans and hinders real medical progress. Highly educated people who know what they are talking about, so shove you culture of ignorance, in fact the ignorance and intransigence is on the opposite side! The very fact that you try such inane tactics says a lot about animal researchers and their mentality!

[Sign in to Report](#)**Baxter Zappa**

Posts: 11

May 3, 2013

The comments by Lindy are not accurate not relevant to the matter at hand, and show a general ignorance of science and biology research. While animal models are sometimes a poor representation of what happens in humans, there are many more similarities than differences between mammals. Furthermore, the research going on in this facility was not "animal testing" per se. They were not testing a drug on normal rodents and extrapolating to normal humans; they were working with genetic models of human diseases in rodents to better understand the diseases toward developing treatment strategies.

I do not condone unnecessary suffering of animals (human and non-human alike) and think that research subjects (and food animals) should be treated with appropriate respect. I have worked personally to save the lives of lab animals. But ignorantly attacking, as this group has done, shows little compassion in the end, for example releasing mice with no immune system who will quickly catch diseases and die miserably... that is about as helpful as taking premature babies out of their incubators and putting them in a park.

[Sign in to Report](#)

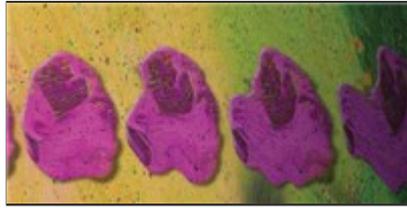
## Related Articles



## Notable Science Quotes

By *The Scientist* Staff

Eugene Garfield, the cancer moonshot, employee genetic testing, and more



## Scientists Successfully Transplant Human Leukemia Cells into Mice

By Diana Kwon

While studying the progression of healthy cells into cancerous ones, researchers discover a way to engraft human blood cells into animals.



## Q&A: Marching for Science in Memphis

By Tracy Vence

A conversation with activist and undergraduate student Sydney Bryar

# TheScientist

[Home](#) [News & Opinion](#) [The Nutshell](#) [Multimedia](#) [Magazine](#) [Advertise](#) [About & Contact](#) [Privacy Policy](#) [Job Listings](#) [Subscribe](#) [Archive](#)

Now Part of the LabX Media Group: [Lab Manager Magazine](#) | [LabX](#) | [LabWrench](#)