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# Science Focus

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# END OF YEAR Q&A

SPECIAL ISSUE

*Are spiders getting bigger? Can air travel ever be green?*

*Is COVID-19 endemic? Can you cook a turkey by dropping it from space?*

*Is working from home good for the environment? Are Asian wasps invading?*

*Why do anxious thoughts arrive late at night? Do four-day weeks work?*

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## EYE OPENER

## Galaxy smash-up

NGC 5953 & NGC 5954

Captured by the Hubble Space Telescope, these two galaxies are caught in a dangerous dance that will culminate – at some point in the very, very distant future – in their merging. They're likely to have been dancing for the last billion years and it could be another billion before they become one.

"These are two galaxies having a bad day," says Prof Chris Lintott, astronomer at the University of Oxford and presenter for BBC Four's *The Sky At Night*. "Named NGC 5953 and NGC 5954, these two spiral galaxies are colliding, and you can see material from NGC 5954 being twisted and distorted by the gravitational pull of its neighbour."

While these collisions are common between smaller galaxies in the Universe, a merger of this size is "once in a lifetime," says Lintott.

We know that our own Milky Way will experience a similar collision in around five billion years' time, with our neighbouring galaxy Andromeda.

NASA/ESA/HUBBLE SPACE TELESCOPE

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