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Artificial intelligence experts in Switzerland are using computer-generated creatures as a first step towards creating life.

Josh Bongard's team at the University of Zurich has created computer simulations with muscles, senses and nervous systems.

Each has been 'grown' from artificial embryos and given a string of random numbers representing its genome.

As in real life the virtual cells contain simulated chemicals that make them react in a different ways.

Mr Bongard believes tracking the evolution of his simulated creatures may show how to construct complex genomes in real life.

He told [New Scientist](#) that so far none of his virtual charges has grown the equivalent of a brain, but hopes that "brain-like regions" could develop once the creatures are assigned tasks.

He said: "The mid-term goal is to keep posing increasingly complex tasks to see at what point you start to see cognition."

Mr Bongard's team presented their work to the International Workshop on Biology Inspired Robotics at HP Labs in Bristol.

Story filed: 19:03 Wednesday 21st August 2002

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