

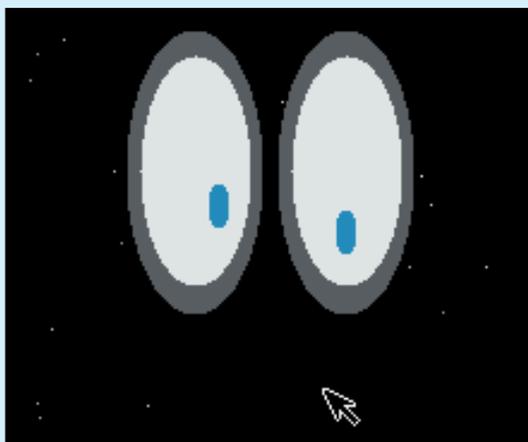
Desktopia MOVING BACKDROPS

All work and no play makes your desktop a very dull place, so Jo Moskalewski put aside more serious matters this month in favour of a little fun

When looking for a home, the first thing you have to consider is whether it fulfils its basic purpose: a roof over your head, shelter from the wind and a warm place to sleep. These things alone may make a house, but they don't make a home: comfort and cosiness are just as important. Take your own home for example, pictures may embellish the walls, there may be plants adorning the windowsills, and despite the adequate seating capacity at the dining table you probably also have a sofa, though this takes up more than a little of your living area. All these items are there more for their feelgood factor than for their functionality.

The eyes have it

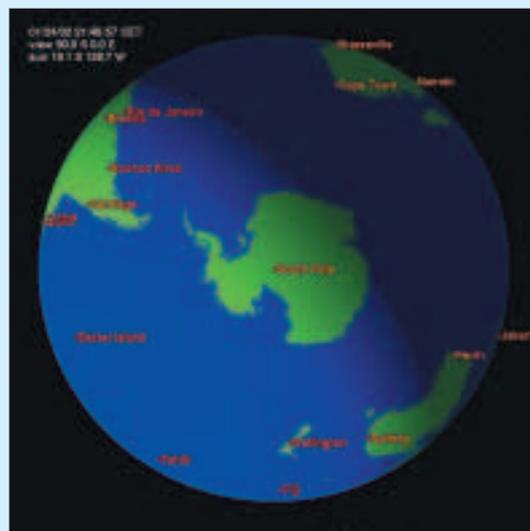
Things are no different on your computer: letters need writing, emails need answering, and information needs to be researched on the Web. To do this, you need little more than a handful of applications; as a Linux user, you don't even need a graphical user interface – the text console is perfectly adequate. Since a graphical user interface uses up valuable system resources, you could manage without one and reliably deal with all your tasks with a very much cheaper computer. Nevertheless, graphics are usually a must, because only then does the whole thing give you something to look at too.



Big Brother is watching you

deskTOPia

Only you can decide how your Linux desktop looks. With deskTOPia we regularly take you with us on a journey into the land of window managers and desktop environments, presenting the useful and the colourful, viewers and pretty toys.



Xearth –pos “fixed -90.00 0.00” – 24 hour sunbathing at the South Pole

To make your desktop as cosy and welcoming as your home there is a wealth of applications which serve no functional purpose other than to give your eyes something interesting to look at. Xeyes, which comes as a part of every distribution, is a classic amongst irrational applications. Once started, via the `xeyes` command, it will never let your mouse out of its sight.

Xeyes also includes all kind of options, which you can add on at the start. For example you can adjust all the colours and determine both position and size. Details on how to do this are revealed by the instructions, which can be viewed via the command `man xeyes`. Every time you make an erroneous command you get a short overview, which in line with tradition, can also be termed `xeyes -help`.

The view from here

A somewhat more extravagant moving desktop classic is Xearth. Behind the name there hides a globe rotating as a background graphic. Xearth in the shell also answers to its own name and offers both the long (*man xearth*) as well as the short (*xearth --help*) instructions and at the same time includes numerous options. For example there is the interesting option of being able to define one's home town via degrees of longitude and latitude as the centre of the earth. The author's home is at:

```
xearth -pos "fixed 48.42 9.00"
```

Henceforth, the globe is no longer turned to the sunny side, but day and night travel over the computer's home. If on the other hand you miss having the moon in the firmament, turn the tables with the parameter *-pos moon* and look at the earth from its satellite. From this point of view you can see which part of the blue planet is covered by clouds, or where the Moon is extinguished in the light of day. With the parameter *-noroot* this can also be done in an independent window (and thus independently of the desktop background).

Mars attacks!

For many people it's the rocks which are more remote from the Sun that are more fascinating than the Moon and Earth, such as Mars for example, which is currently very much in fashion. Straight away, someone came up with a cartography of the red planet, implemented this work in Xearth and named the combination Xmars. Anyone who now compiles this Martian source code will still come up with an earthly program file: rather than an *xmars* executable out pops a file with the name of its forefather – *xearth*. It would seem a good idea to rename it manually when you install it. Although Xmars may not be up to the current level of the countless Xearth options, there are still plenty of them.

Another Xearth offshoot is Xglobe. This, just like KDE, is built on the Qt library and, being true to its origins, also has an adequate command parameter (*-kde*). This ensures KDE co-operation on all virtual desktops. Xglobe also offers a more realistic map of the world than the original, although it is somewhat more sparsely documented. The only remedy is tedious experimentation and the command *xglobe --help | less*, if you want to change from the (well-selected throughout) factory default settings.

One *-kde* parameter is not an adequate argument to get KDE to co-operate. KDE would much rather be begged a little, which you can do in the background configuration dialog of the control centre: instead of an image or a colour, select Background Program, and then mark your preferred heavenly body tool in the Setup dialog.

Sea of tranquillity

It's not only high in the sky that you can find useful superfluities, a look under water also brings some movement to your desktop. Aquariums are said to exert a calming effect, and so Xfishtank is surely the Valium of backgrounds. Obviously you can define the colour of the water here, as well as its oxygen content and population. There's no need to take a healthy mix ratio into account in the pixel world, although you should do when it comes to aesthetic features: With poison-green, de-oxygenated water and just one fish, you're scarcely likely to achieve a calming effect. A manual here also points the way to be a successful aquarian once you depart from the default settings.

One option which does work is *-d*, with which you a scanned-in coral reef – set in advance, for example, with *xsetroot -bitmap korallenriff.xbm* as an ordinary background graphic – can serve as the backdrop for your scaly pets. *xfishtank* makes the fish swim around on the desktop painting which you will then find – the header image shows the fishes in the *xglobe* universe. Without the option *-d* your fishes will be confronted by monotone water without decoration.

Don't hold back

The *xscreensaver* presented in Linux Magazine Issue 16, can also be misused for animated backgrounds. The parameter *-root* is used for this, which you should append to the direct command for a screensaver module. The modules are to be found in an *xscreensaver* directory, reached via the command *locate /xscreensaver/*. So the following command starts the Matrix screen saver as an animated background:

```
/usr/lib/xscreensaver/xmatrix -root
```

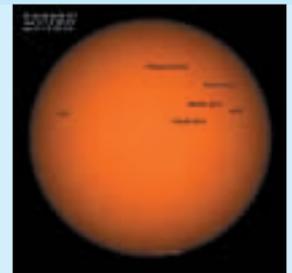
You should, however, watch your CPU load because Xmatrix, like all other Xscreensavers, wasn't developed with a view to such a deliberate misuse. So although

```
/usr/lib/xscreensaver/xmatrix -root -delay 200002  
-small -density 40 -trace
```

may look very nice, it will easily take up more than half of the available CPU capacity even on a generously-sized computer.

Info

Xearth	http://www.cs.colorado.edu/~tuna/xearth/
Xmars	http://tallyho.bc.nu/~stevelxmars.html
Xglobe	http://www.cs.unc.edu/~scheuerm/xglobe/
Xfishtank	ftp://sunsite.unc.edu/pub/Linux/X11/demos/xfishtank-2.1tp.tar.gz
Xscreensaver	http://www.jwz.org/xscreensaver



Mars – helps you work, rest and play



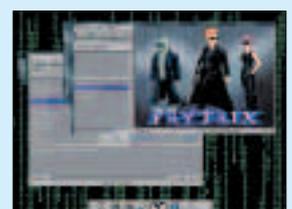
Reality show XGlobe



Xearth or Xglobe as KDE background from the control centre



Fish in space with xfishtank and xglobe



Screensaver Xmatrix as animated background