

LETTERS

to the editor

Accurate observation

Your report of our observation of optical radiation from a pulsar (SN: 2/1, p. 111) was not only one of the first in print but also one of the most accurate and detailed. The accuracy of quotation is especially appreciated.

If this is typical of your science news coverage then you certainly keep your readers well informed about current developments in science.

*Dr. W. J. Cocke
Dr. M. J. Disney
Dr. D. J. Taylor
Steward Observatory
University of Arizona
Tucson, Ariz.*

Ecological honesty

Your editorial and feature article in (SN: 2/8, p. 132, 134) were of particular interest to me, as I have made about a dozen forays into the South American rain forest for journalistic enterprises of one sort or another.

The sudden spurt of concern for Amazonia can only be described as thrilling to a conservationist, but frankly one aspect of the note of alarm puz-

zles me. I have seen how devastating man's presence can be in isolated pockets of the tropical rain forest. But it is possible to fly over the forest hour after hour in a small plane without seeing any sign of human occupation. The tropical rain forest is a fragile community, but there's an awful lot of it down there. There must be millions of acres that have never felt the foot of a human. Perhaps in future issues your man in Amazonia will explain why the whole forest is in peril.

I believe that now is the time to do the research, but I wonder if the cries of alarm are really honest.

*Alan Mark Fletcher
Science Editor
J. B. Lippincott Company
Philadelphia, Pa.*

Went and Stark

I was pleased to see in your article (SN: 2/8, p. 134) that you considered the mycorrhiza work of Dr. Stark and myself so important. We, ourselves, of course, are completely convinced of this, but it is nice to find that others agree. It was unfortunate that Dr. Stark was unable to participate personally at the meeting in Colombia.

*Dr. F. W. Went
Professor of Botany
Desert Research Institute
Reno, Nev.*

I appreciate your kindness in forwarding the copy of SCIENCE NEWS to me. The report on my paper (SN: 2/8, p. 134) is correct, although I hope I did not imply that the soils contained, "no stored soluble plant nutrients." I meant it to imply that the soil contained almost no stored soluble plant nutrients. I thank you for a faithful job of reporting and for bringing to the attention of the scientific public a serious problem worthy of broad attention. This is the type of article which we want graduate students to read.

*Dr. Nellie Stark
Research Associate
Desert Research Institute
Reno, Nev.*

Bone loss

This is with reference to an interesting article which appeared under Space Medicine in the Aerospace section (SN: 1/18, p. 69). This states that a technique has been developed for measuring the appreciable drop in calcium content of the bones of astronauts caused by long periods of weightlessness.

An apparently novel application occurred to me in the field of biological evolutionary theory, as a means of set-

(See p. 230)

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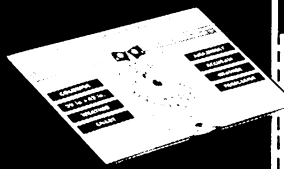
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A noted publisher in Chicago reports there is a simple technique for acquiring a powerful memory which can pay you real dividends in both business and social advancement and works like magic to give you added poise, necessary self-confidence and greater popularity.

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ting up a standard for measuring the biological degree of adaptability of any vertebrate animal. While many specialists in the development of terrestrial life forms regard the ability of an organism to adapt to a new set of environmental conditions as being a critical parameter in determining the survivability factor of that organism, to my knowledge no easily measurable criterion for the quantitative determination of adaptability has yet been developed.

If it is assumed that weightlessness constitutes a new and stressless set of environmental conditions and that the percentage loss of bone calcium represents the adaptation of an organism to the new conditions, then such a quantitative yardstick for determining the adaptability of any vertebrate will have been established.

The new technique for the accurate determination of bone calcium content, called photon absorptiometry in the SCIENCE NEWS article, is said to find application in growth studies of school children. It would, therefore, have the advantage of not in any way injuring the vertebrates being tested.

Donald P. Farquhar
Quasar Research Associates
New York, N.Y.

Food and population

The Rev. Guy J. Cyr, S.M. in his letter (SN: 2/15, p. 156) maintains that if man uses the earth's resources properly, he would produce enough food, fiber, fuel and other items people need for their happiness so that more than 20 billion would be satisfied.

May I ask: Satisfied with what? Isn't the quality of life at least as important as the quantity? Must we continue this mad proliferation until the world is one vast polluted slum? And then what? Once we reach the 20 billion figure, we will have to stop this explosion even according to the Rev. Cyr's figures, and it is impossible to stop it all at once. Why not do all

we can to start slowing this avalanche down while there is still hope of improving the ever-worsening conditions under which a billion or so people must live even now as a result of the fact that the "ingenious men" to whom the Rev. Cyr refers have slowed down death but not birth. It is these same ingenious men who keep warning us that something must be done to slow down birth as well.

H. L. Klopping, Ph.D.
Wilmington, Del.

(We appreciate our readers' comments on this issue. Though letters are still coming in, we feel we can print no more on the subject for the time. Ed.)

Synthetic RNase

I must say I enjoyed your article ("Synthetic Ribonuclease;" SN: 2/1, p. 112) very much. I think it was one of the best I have read, possibly because you didn't quote all the same things that everyone else did.

Robert G. Denkwalter
Vice President for Exploratory Research
Merck & Co., Inc.
Rahway, N. J.

Cavalier answer

Re (SN: 12/14, p. 596) "Checking Coulomb's Law" and (SN: 2/8, p. 133) "to the editor" letter "Numbers." I agree with Quine, and I feel that "(The hyphen tells the tale, Ed.)" is a cavalier answer. If a "thousand-billionth" is anything, it is a trillionth, and should be so labeled. I believe your answer is unworthy of a science publication.

Ralph P. Thompson
Georgetown, Del.

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