

OF THE WEEK

urban migration reverses	36
probing the oil mystery	36
chemicals and your health	38
hmo's and your health	38
the sahara's wayward sand	38
on the whale trail	39
return to the polymath?	39

RESEARCH NOTES

environmental sciences	40
biomedical sciences	40
natural sciences	41
aerospace	41

ARTICLES

report on antarctica	42
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DEPARTMENTS

letters	35
books	46

COVER: Ice-covered Antarctica, the only continent set aside by international treaty for scientific research, is under study this year by scientists from nearly a dozen nations, including 175 from the United States. See p. 43. (Photo: Sentinel Range looking north toward 16,786-foot Mt. Tyree/U.S. Geological Survey)

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Year-end review of science

I wish to compliment SCIENCE NEWS for its new feature "Science News of the Year" (SN: 12/22-29/73). It is a very useful device for the scientific community in general, to serve as a briefing of outstanding developments in science during the past year, and for individual scientists to check up what has been done in the field of some particular studies and research by other scientists.

Anatol J. Shneiderov
Arctic Institute of North America
Washington, D.C.

Interest in physics

There may be deeper reasons for the decline of interest in physics (SN: 10/13/73, p. 230).

Several decades ago, we saw brilliant ideas in quantum theory and relativity confirmed by ingenious experiments. Nuclear energy and transistors have also opened vast new areas in technology. In recent years, however, big research budgets have produced many big machines but not many big results. In contrast to the earlier successes in the theoretical predictions and experimental confirmations of photons, positrons, mesons, etc., we have seen futile searches for quarks, monopoles, gravitons, tachyons, etc. Hence physics has acquired a reputation of being a difficult subject, but not necessarily exciting, with poor job opportunities.

At present, there is more financial reward in medicine or law, more research glamour in molecular biology, and more outdoor living in oceanography. The decline of interest in physics is therefore not unexpected.

L. Stevenson
College Park, Md.

Both Senior Editor Dietrick E. Thomsen and Paul A. Zerzan, in their discussion of causes of the decline in physics enrollments in high school, seem unaware of a basic change in science education.

When the 1950 survey of enrollment and attitudes was made, practically all junior high school pupils had either three semesters or three years of general science.

In 1970 junior high school pupils had either one semester or one year each of

biology, earth science and physical science. The latter course includes more physics than chemistry.

My guess is that when pupils are required to take the physical science course in concentrated form they simply conclude that what they have had is all or more than they want.

Victor C. Smith
(Retired general science textbook author)
Monmouth, Ore.

Peregrines just passing through

Lewis E. Dickinson (SN: 12/8/73, p. 355) comments upon the sighting of four peregrine falcons on Block Island as refuting SCIENCE NEWS' report that "no peregrines in the wild are left east of the Rockies."

The peregrines Dickinson refers to are from the high Arctic and were at the time of sighting migrating through Block Island. Within recent memory, far more than four peregrines should have paused at the island in the three October days he cited.

Within Dickinson's lifetime, he need not have awaited uncertainly for peregrines of passage to cross his island. Indeed, he could have visited a half dozen active peregrine nests within neighboring Massachusetts. But, for the record, SCIENCE NEWS was correct in its statement that peregrines no longer exist in the wild east of the Rockies in the United States. Existing requires more than flying—some of us feel that breeding is an indispensable facet of existing.

Wayne Hanley
Editor
Massachusetts Audubon Society
Lincoln, Mass.

Disgusted about ESP

I would like to second the position of P. M. deLaubenfels of Corvallis, Ore., concerning the disgusting ESP article in your fine magazine (SN: 12/15/73, p. 371). I would like to add, as a long time observer with a fair background in science myself, that the earth is flat.

Stephen Marcus
Goleta, Calif.

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