

SCIENCE NEWS®

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COVER: A pair of interacting galaxies, photographed by the new Cerro Tololo 4-meter telescope then enhanced with the Kitt Peak Interacting Picture Processing System to emphasize areas of neutral hydrogen. A description of the galaxies is on p. 121. A five-article special report on astronomy begins on p. 132. (Photo: Kitt Peak National Observatory)

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LETTERS

Are scientists dogmatists?

I can agree quite happily with the idealism of science as expressed by yourself July 12 in the "unsolicited and somewhat tangential comment" and with Paul J. Willis' (Aug. 2) supportive statements and quote. But—unfortunately, this questing and lack of dogmatism is only rarely expressed by the scientists themselves. My own experience in reading and associating with a considerable number of scientists shows that the most likely times for lack of dogmatism are in regard to the works of others and during periods of failure in their own work. The rest of the time, they seem to be absolutists to an absurd degree when considering the almost certain changes in everything.

Sorry but I don't think it's possible to separate the scientists from science with the intent of retaining the purity of the latter. The so-called "scientific method" is not a thing in itself and everything about "it" has flopped around in constant change. I think it's about time we gave up talking about Science and Scientists and started talking about people, all of whom are "quest(ing) for truth . . ." in their own highly individualistic ways.

H. H. Southwick,
President
Sierra Grizzly Corporation
South Pasadena, Calif.

The real significance

Jonathan Eberhart's column, "Apollo-Soyuz as News" (SN: 8/2/75, p. 72), touched me strongly. One of the reasons I read SCIENCE NEWS is that your publication gives the real significance of the news without the kind of false "journalism" you mention. At the same time SN keeps it readable and interesting, in easily-digested pieces—the real goal, I'm sure, that you aim for: popularization without distortion. Consider this a fan letter directed to all of you responsible for SN! My responsibilities require me to maintain a general familiarity with new ideas and trends in all the sciences, and your magazine is a real help.

Rinehart S. Potts
Library Education Department
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Glassboro, N.J.

Cultivating endangered plants

Janet Weinberg's article on plant extinction (SN: 8/9/75, p. 92) was excellent and pointed out a critical problem. What I don't understand is why any state, such as Hawaii,

This is our annual end-of-summer double-sized issue devoted, in the articles section, to research in astronomy. We will return to our usual schedules and format with next week's issue.—Ed.

would stand by and let 50 percent of its 2,000 plant species teeter on the brink of extinction without at least trying to maintain them in cultivated gardens. Plant breeders, who have an intense interest in preserving diverse forms of the few select species they work with, maintain large seed collections, sowing them frequently enough to maintain seed viability. The International Rice Research Institute alone maintains over 30,000 separate varieties of rice. Surely the state of Hawaii, or any other state, could afford to maintain the 1,000 plant species threatened within its borders. Admittedly, the seeding habits of some wild plants would have to be studied in order to make cultivation possible. After reading Ms. Weinberg's article, however, I wager that I could get these plants into cultivation faster than the government is getting them onto its endangered species list.

Paul Lyrene
Assistant Professor of Agronomy
University of Florida
Canal Point, Fla.

There is an incongruity in the Aug. 9 SCIENCE NEWS that bothers me. I refer to the articles "The Thirsty Capital" and "Botanocrats and the Fading Flora." The botanocrats are moving slowly, but because they are afraid of losing their law. It seems to me the law needs revising, it's potentially too powerful.

The history of life is the development of new species and the extinction of old. While we shouldn't unnecessarily cause extinction, as we have in the past, should we try to protect all endangered species? Populations are growing too rapidly but the people are there and need to be fed and watered. Should we try to control the population by denying the water stored in a reservoir, or should the esoteric endangered species be risked? Isn't it wiser to build the dams and pipe the water to the metropolitan areas rather than move the people to the water?

It seems to me that at least sometimes the highest and best use of a piece of land may be the dam, the superhighway, and the parking lot. In those places even the endangered species must yield. With proper modifications in the law there would be no need to move slowly in declaring a species endangered. There must be exceptions.

P. M. deLaubenfels
Corvallis, Ore.

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