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COVER: Coelacanths have given more to zoology than just their share of information on the evolution of land animals. These living prehistoric fish have engendered a cult, complete with poems, an opera, a protective society, die-hard explorers—and interesting research. The passion for coelacanths in the scientific world has not escaped notice by the Comoro Islanders. This postage stamp was issued in 1954, after specimen number two was hooked near one island of the emerald archipelago. See p. 28. (Photo: California Academy of Sciences)

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JANUARY 10, 1976

LETTERS

The Geller/Sarfatti controversy

When quantum-expert Jack Sarfatti pronounced Uri Geller's paranormal abilities "beyond the doubt of any reasonable man . . .," he stepped on the toes of quite a number of "unreasonable" people who thought Geller was a fraud *then*. Now, about a year later, in a lofty emotional quantum leap, he finds Geller no longer "of any serious interest to scientists . . ." (Letters, SN: 12/6/75, p. 355). Gee, those people's toes still hurt!

May I recommend Jack Sarfatti show his sincerity by refraining for a couple of years from statements, at least in public, in fields in which he has not yet become entirely steady?

His newly acquired expertise in stage magic, I'm sure, can be harmlessly applied in the privacy of his home, among friends, after dinner.

*Joachim Stolzenegger
Mill Valley, Calif.*

Reversing atherosclerosis

The report on cholestyramine (SN: 11/29/75, p. 340) ascribes to Rifkind the statement "this was the first evidence from primates that we could reverse atherosclerosis. . . . Now we are getting more evidence that we can do it not only with diet, but with a drug."

This apparently overlooks the work of Armstrong, Warner and Connor (CIRCULATION RESEARCH 27:59-67, July 1970, "Regression of Coronary Atherosclerosis in Rhesus Monkeys"), who reported their results two years prior to the cited experience of Wissler and his group. The finding that cholestyramine accelerates the regression of atherosclerosis is certainly an important one, and the clinical studies should provide an important corroboration of the working hypothesis of the Longevity Foundation of America, whose programs have apparently already accomplished these ends in humans ("Live Longer Now," Grosset & Dunlap, 1974, pp. xiv-xvi).

*F.R. Chamberlain
Manrise Corporation
La Canada, Calif.*

SI matters

The article "What's the latest in the SI scene? Peta, exa, gray, and becquerel" (SN: 12/6/75, p. 363) brought to my attention the

problems associated with giving new names (prefixes) to exponents of 10. One has to memorize or consult a table of prefixes in order to use them, and as ever larger or smaller numbers are used, more prefixes must be invented. Since prefixes must often be converted to exponents of 10 in order to perform computations, this conversion can be a source of error.

A simpler system would use one symbol meaning "10 to the plus" (p), and another symbol meaning "10 to the minus" (n). For example, the total amount of energy currently delivered to consumers in the United States each day would be written 1 p17 J (1×10^{17} J). Similarly, the size of a red blood cell is about 7 n6 m (7×10^{-6} m) in diameter.

*Steven W. Siegan
Detroit, Mich.*

In your editorial comments on some of the new SI units which are (shall we say) less than utopian in effect, I am surprised that you have not mentioned the change in the name of the micron.

Now, when you see the word "micrometer," you have to stop and think: Is it MICROMETER (a unit of length), or is it MICROMETER (a measuring instrument)? Or, worse yet, is the word pronounced the same in both meanings, by analogy with kilometer?

*Herbert L. Gross
South Orange, N.J.*

A big difference

Lynn Arthur Steen's article, "Computer Chess . . ." (SN: 11/29/75, p. 345) was extremely interesting and well done, but I suppose it's the teacher in me that demands that I comment on one minor point: If 10^{80} years is "only slightly less time" than 10^{90} years, a one-year subscription to SCIENCE NEWS (\$10) costs only slightly less than the U.S. defense budget (around \$100,000,000,000). One is only 10^{10} times the other!

*Karl F. Kuhn
Associate Professor of Physics
Eastern Kentucky University
Richmond, Ky.*

Titles for research grants

Both Karl T. Pflock and Philip C. Keller in replying to the interesting "Off the Beat" article "Grant Titles from History," (SN: 10/25/75, p. 266) which was a delightful spoof, missed an obvious and important point.

The scientist needs to learn to write good titles to his project proposals. A good title informs and cannot have fun made of it.

*P.M. deLaubenfels
Corvallis, Ore.*

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