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Incorporating Science News Letter

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COVER: The crustacean *Ilyarachna hirticeps*, which lives at an ocean depth of 5,000 feet and lacks eyes entirely, is one of the animals encountered by a Scripps Institution of Oceanography research group in their exploration of life in the ocean's depths. See p. 394. (Photo: Scripps)

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JUNE 19, 1976

LETTERS

Astronomy and city lights

It's good to see that some progress is being made in the effort to halt the unrelenting proliferation of light pollution (SN: 5/1/76, p. 278). It's not only the major observatories that must deal with the problem. A little known band of dedicated people, whose work contributes significantly to the astronomical sciences, are also faced with this problem everywhere. These are the serious amateur astronomers. The amateur must find a suitable observing location, provide his own observatory and equipment, and process and publish his data at his own expense. He often gets it all together only to find that he is soon wiped out by the encroachment of "ever-improving" outdoor lighting.

Perhaps the most important aspect of the problem is that concerning the ordinary citizen mentioned in the last sentence of your article. There is little doubt that he has been robbed of his right to appreciate the night sky. An astronomy professor from American University once noted, at a meeting of the National Capitol Astronomers in Washington, that a poll among students enrolled in an introductory astronomy course taken as an elective revealed that as many as 70 percent had never seen the Milky Way, and a significant number had never seen stars!

Hopefully, more communities will follow the example set by the citizens of Tucson and take steps to prevent further deterioration of the night sky.

Marvin E. Baldwin
Butlerville, Ind.

Punitive parenting

Correlational support for one's own theoretical position is a pleasure, but when a group of investigators can forecast behavior utilizing an independent variable you have been insisting for years was "the" important one, that's sheer bliss. Langner, Gersten and Eisenberg's ability to show that punitive parenting was the most powerful forecaster of all of their derived predictors was of no surprise to me ("East Side, West Side: Growing Up in Manhattan," SN: 5/15/76, p. 315).

For some time now I have insisted that severe parental punishment (namely the belt, board, cord, or fist used in the name of firm parental discipline) can significantly lower a child's aggressive threshold, is the primary source of aggression that fuels delinquency, and is also the probable reason delinquents

condition poorly on aversive tasks, rendering them less than capable in learning from past mistakes. In fact, my own data indicates that the recidivist male delinquent who has never been exposed to a belt, board, cord, or fist (or the equivalent) is virtually nonexistent.

Thank God Langner and his colleagues had the foresight to ask mothers whether their discipline had ever involved the use of a belt or a stick. Had they, as so many investigators have done in the past, simply asked the parents if they had ever utilized corporal punishment (the open hand to the rear is in no way equivalent to the belt or stick), the power of their predictor would unquestionably have been lost. I also find it quite refreshing that they ignored the number of hours their subjects spent viewing TV violence, a popular item among those investigating aggression nowadays, which is probably of secondary significance. After all, real life violence is what really counts.

Ralph S. Welsh, Ph.D.
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What price beauty?

As a dedicated hiker who has explored and enjoyed nearly half of our National Parks over the last 15 years, I read with great interest and concern the timely article, "Preserving the Alaskan Frontier" by John H. Douglas (SN: 5/29/76, p. 345) where nine areas of the Alaskan frontier are under consideration by the Congress for addition to the National Park System along with the two existing national parks in that state being expanded.

I cannot agree, however, with author Douglas's conclusion that "the issue now before Congress eventually will come down to this: 'What price beauty?'" It is my contention that for the good of present and especially future generations, the real importance in preserving wilderness and wildlife is not so much that we need these undisturbed complete ecosystems—we do—but more importantly we need to develop and exercise those human attributes required for saving the American bald eagle and the Arctic glacier bear. In other words, it is not really a question of "what price beauty," but "what price humanity?"

We all need to protect man from himself and to live in harmony instead of dominating his environment completely. Perhaps that is, in the final analysis, the crucial thought to ponder in our Bicentennial.

William J. Keppler, Ph.D.
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More letters appear on page 397.

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