

SCIENCE NEWS®

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COVER: Solved code of a man threatening mass murder in California in 1969. Computers have become a powerful tool in codebreaking, relieving the cryptanalyst from the drudgery of repeated elementary operations often required to unravel a code. See p. 188. (Photo: UPI)

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SEPTEMBER 18, 1976

LETTERS

Perspective on discoveries

Your July 21 Letters column included an interesting quotation from Wheeler, "his (the scientist's) choices will determine what he finds," and an amusing discussion of the fact that both *Homo erectus* and *Australopithecus* are found in the same spots. A connection exists here that relates to neither letter, but is of importance to science in general.

The Leakeys found those bones in their native Kenya precisely and declaredly because that was where the elder Leakey was determined he would look. His perseverance paid off in old findings and his son's in yet older ones. Discussions of this fact seem to tend towards the conclusion that Kenya is therefore the cradle of man. In the same way, we have tended to believe that inventions and all things civilized and useful came from the Middle East. Only recently has this costly lack of perspective undergone some gradual reversal. We find things in the Middle East first because we have looked there: it is the source of our main religions and therefore of traditional scholarly interest. Also, as in Kenya, we find old things preserved in the Middle East because the weather there preserves them best. To conclude from this that historical and anthropological events occurred where preservation was best reflects a woeful lack of thought. Yet I have not seen this simple cautionary statement made elsewhere, and therefore offer it for your consideration.

Robert W. Whitaker
Washington, D.C.

ORV tracks in the Mojave

I read with alarm the article in SCIENCE NEWS (SN: 7/10/76, p. 24), and with even more alarm the original article itself in the June CALIFORNIA GEOLOGY concerning the effects of off-road vehicles on the Mojave Desert. I have seen this damage in person, and these articles have given foundation to my developing fears. I brought my concern to the attention of the state representatives of my district, California Senator Dennis Carpenter and California Assemblyman Richard Robinson. The results were disappointing. Mr. Robinson never replied and Mr. Carpenter, a member of the California Wildlife Conservation Board, believes nothing is wrong. To quote Mr. Carpenter: "In my opinion . . . an overwhelming percentage of motorcycle riders are extremely conscientious when it comes to preventing and

taking care of the area which they use for recreational purposes." Obviously, the situation in regards the Mojave Desert is going to continue unless there is an effort made to elicit some reasonable response from the California Legislature. I have written again to my representatives, as well as to other Senate and Assembly members in my area; I would hope that other concerned California residents would do the same.

Tim M. Sharon, Ph.D.
Radiation Physics
University of California at Irvine
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Ornery little teleologs

The article "Clean crabs" by Joan Arehart-Treichel (SN: 7/10/76, p. 28) contains several unusual descriptions of consciousness verging on the teleological.

"Her supercleanliness is a heroic effort to safeguard the survival of her species."

"The female parasite has a reason for laying her eggs in this part of the crab."

"They realize that even cleaning is not an adequate defense. . . ."

"The parasite appraised the crabs . . . then realized that they had evolved too far away physiologically. . . ." (This one is especially good.)

I applaud your continued efforts to make technical matters interesting and readable, but please, not at the expense of creating awareness and purpose where the illusion thereof can only confuse and mislead.

Rinehart S. Potts
Assistant Professor
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Glassboro, N.J.

ZPG for rats?

The report on a new compound for male contraception reminded me that for some years now a male contraceptive effective in rats has existed. Rats, however, remain a major pest in our cities. Surely a bait containing a male contraceptive could be produced which would be both safer and more effective than present poisons in destroying this pest. Even if expensive to make, the prospect of eventual elimination or at least effective control of this rodent would justify a substantial subsidy from the federal government.

M. V. Kirchhofer
Buffalo, N.Y.

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