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Incorporating Science News Letter

OF THE WEEK

Carter defers nuclear reprocessing	244
Early fossils from Pakistan	244
Uranus's strange rings	245
Bill on DNA research	245
Making cancer cells normal	246
Artificial penis	246
Closing the DNA circle	247
A 25-meter telescope	247

RESEARCH NOTES

Behavior	248
Energy	249
Astronomy	249

ARTICLES

Profile of Frank Press	250
Venus photos refined	252

DEPARTMENTS

Books	242
Letters	243

COVER: A Senate confirmation hearing for the appointment of geophysicist Frank Press to head the White Office of Science and Technology Policy was held last week, but he has been busy unofficially at the job for more than a month now. In the hearing and in an interview with SCIENCE NEWS, Press discussed his goals and priorities as Presidential science adviser. See p. 250. (Photo: John H. Douglas)

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LETTERS

Saccharin ban

I couldn't resist writing this letter after reading your article entitled "Saccharin Ban: A Sour Reception" (SN: 3/19/77, p. 182). I could not believe my eyes when I read their reasons for giving the rats such a large dose of the sweetener. Their explanation for their actions seems similar to the man who rolls a couple boulders into the side of his house to save time in finding out how much damage would be caused if several hundred smaller stones of the same cumulative weight were hurled at his house over a period of years. After reading that article I wonder how the scientific community has the nerve to sneer at the pseudo-sciences.

Dennis M. Cox
Miramar, Fla.

Old fallacy in reverse

I suppose the fact that the articles on recombinant DNA and saccharin were back-to-back in the March 19 SCIENCE NEWS was no accident. They both point up a growing mentality in our land that bothers me very much. For want of a better name, I'll call it the "Sierra Club Mentality." Let me hasten to point out that I in no way wish to derogate reasoned criticism by knowledgeable persons, but so many only think they are knowledgeable.

Whether it's the above subjects, field burning, banning hand guns, strip mining, atomic power, pesticides, food dyes or dams on the Tennessee, they all are operating in reverse the old fallacy that "if some is good, more is better." You even quote one as saying, "If . . . an Andromeda scenario has even the smallest possibility of occurring, we must assume it will occur. . . ." I wonder if he drives a car or consumes salt?

P. M. deLaubenfels
Corvallis, Ore.

Brutal research methods?

The juxtaposition of the "Depression in Bonnet Monkeys" article and "Koko: The Signs of Language" was fascinating (SN: 3/12/77, p. 172). After describing an "experiment" where human beings intentionally tortured an infant monkey with an action that would be unthinkable if applied to another human being, we read about humans differing apparently only in degree from apes. Perhaps some day we will realize that we differ only in degree from all forms of life, including the "living" systems of stars and

universes, and that our mistreatment of these living things and working systems for any reason (including an inflated sense of our own importance) is absolutely inexcusable and utterly wrong. I would also venture that it isn't really as necessary to use these brutal research methods as some experimenters would have us believe, in order to get the information they feel they need.

Rae Ladore
Shoreham, N. Y.

Illusion of depth

The several letters pertaining to optical illusions printed in recent issues of SCIENCE NEWS (Stuart Grover et al.) bring to mind a little maneuver which can coax nature into letting one view ordinary flat pictures as though they were three-dimensional.

The idea is to circumvent nature's two gauges for determining distance. By closing one eye, one of these is eliminated. The other can be side-stepped by curling the index finger around to form a small aperture with the base of the thumb, then peering at the picture through the resulting pinhole. With these two distance determiners out of the way, we are free to interpret the picture with all the depth our imagination desires.

Glenn D. Reyner
Norris, Tenn.

Who is 'normal'?

In response to "Dyslexia: A Hemispheric Explanation" (SN: 1/22/77, p. 55), I would like to ask, "Is it possible that it is the normal among us, not the dyslexic children, who have a problem?"

Has anyone ever considered that these children are actually one rung up on the evolutionary ladder—leading us to a time when man will use both sides of his brain with equal dexterity thereby increasing his problem-solving capacity?

We should not delay too long in finding a way to help such children function in "modern, highly literate societies" lest we lose too many more of them to "serious secondary behavioral and emotional problems" simply because we lack sensitivity in dealing with them. They may be our hope for man's survival on this planet.

Mrs. Anna Emeigh
Pittsburgh, Pa.

The elegant electron

Once again I feel the excitement that comes with mentally "seeing" an important scientific experiment. Hans G. Demelt's measurement and stimulation of the single suspended electron (SN: 2/12/77, p. 101) fulfills an important scientific need.

Anton T. Luck
Hemphill, W. Va.

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